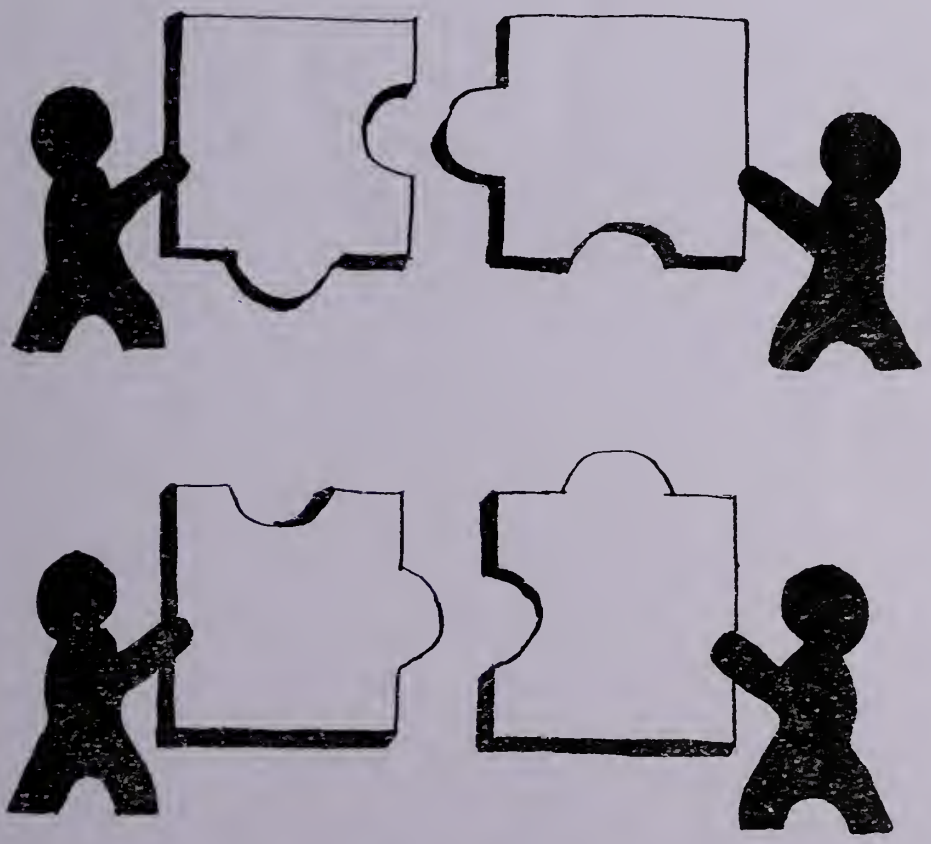
WRITING CENTER - LAWRENCE

Writers In Progress



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Writers in Progress

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We congratulate Lyndsey Whitehouse of North Andover, a student in Rachel Hellmann's spring 2009 Illustration class, who won the *Writers in Progress* cover design contest. Her design was selected as the best choice for our cover because it inspires the progress that Basic Writing students need to make over the course of the semester. We are grateful for all of the talented designs submitted by the Illustration class.

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This edition of *Writers in Progress* is dedicated to Diane Gori who is retiring as the coordinator of the Writing Center after twenty-three years of service to Northern Essex Community College.

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Introduction
By Lisa Mahoney

Welcome to Basic Writing. As with most new things, you may be going through many emotions—one of which may be fear. It could be the basic fears of something new. It could be the fear of failing. It could be the fear of … [fill in the blank]. You are in good company and I'd like to pass along some words of wisdom that have helped me conquer those same fears in my own life: *Leap and the net will appear.* (Zen Saying)

You see, you will never know what you can accomplish until you try. You just might succeed. Bravo to you for taking the first step—sitting in that Basic Writing chair. Now, let us be your net.

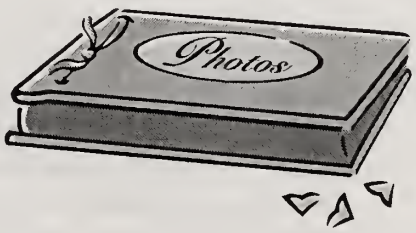
We are here to support you. You will learn many things this semester—about yourself as a person, about yourself as a student, and about yourself as a writer. Our hope is that by the end of the course you will have acquired the necessary tools to carry around in your own personal toolbox to conquer all writing assignments you face in the future. Regardless of whether you love writing or not when you leave us, you *will* have the tools to draw upon and the confidence to use those tools with success.

What you find before you in this text are essays from students just like you. They faced those same fears on day one but as you will see from these samples, they took the leap, attended class, learned the process, followed the steps and…wrote exceptional essays. You can, too.

The Way they Were
by David Porter

Have you ever wondered about how your parents looked, acted, or maybe were on the day they were to be married? For me I have a wonderful reference, my mother and father's wedding album. It shows me all I want to know. I even get to see all my family members before I was born. This wedding album is important to me because it shows me how much in love and happy my parents were on the day that they became husband and wife.

The album itself is a white leather bound book with gold trim. It smells old and musty from the years it spent in our old cabinet. It also smells of smoke as my father and my mother were both smokers so over the years the pages just kind of took on that smell. On the cover it is titled Memories, very fitting don't you think? It also has a fantastic picture on it. In my opinion it's the best picture of the album. It's a picture of my mom and dad's hands and it has a picture on it. My dad's palm has my mom's face in it and my mom's palm holds my dad's face. It is a large rectangular book. It's actually quite heavy. When my father and I read it we have to put it on the table so that we can turn the pages easily. The pages are thick and make a crackling sound when you turn them. It reminds me of an old book that is worn and you have to be very gentle not to break the pages. Each picture is protected by a plastic covering. It also has an illustrated paper so that the plastic that covers the photos does not get dirty or dusty. On the first page there is a spot that reads like an invitation. It tells you who the bride and groom were, where the event was held, the date and time of said event, who the bridesmaids were, who the ushers were, who was the maid of honor, and who the best man was. It also tells you who the photographer was.



This beautifully put together album has many uses. One of those uses is to look back and remember that happy day. That allowed me to be sitting here in class writing about it. My dad uses it to look at, and miss my mom. We really don't have a lot of pictures left from our life except this album. Both mine and my father's past, present and someday future are intertwined within these pages of this book. For me I can look upon this book, and almost see and feel how that day unfolded even though I was not there. When my dad looks at it, I sit and watch him skim through the pages and watch as he gets teary eyed thinking about how happy he was with my mom. There are times that I really do feel bad for him because he misses her so very much.

We keep this book in our new apartment up on the top self of a beautiful cherry oak cabinet with glass windows that is in our living room. Both my father and I can see it every day without having to take it down all the time. The cabinet in the living room is really quite a show piece of the whole room, and with the bright white book on the top shelf it really pops out at everyone who comes over. It looks down at the two of us getting along in life, almost as if it's watching us taking our everyday life and adding to its own history. Once a month I go over it lightly with a moist towel to clean it off as my dad is a smoker and I don't want the pages and the book itself to get all yellow from the nicotine. I also take care of it by always making sure it gets put back on that shelf every

time we take it down. If I take it anywhere like to a friend's house or to relatives to reminisce with me, I always keep it where I can see it, and it's never out of my sight.

I haven't actually acquired it yet, though I will after my dad passes on and is reunited with my mom, who passed away in April of 2001 from a heart attack. She was only 41 years old. It was an incredible blow to both of us. It was such a blow to us that I've had a difficult time bouncing back from it. My dad on the other hand has never bounced back from it. It's actually quite a sad thing to see as he misses his Juliette. I know that the album will become mine because one, I am the only child, and two because both my parents have always told me that whatever they have I will have someday. For that I will treasure it always, and take care of it always. On the day that I realized that the album was going to be mine I was 22 years old, my mom had already passed on, dad and I were in the process of moving out of my childhood home. As I was packing some of our things I came across the album. I stopped packing and took the album and went and sat on the couch. I started to skim through the pages. This was the first time that I had actually looked at the book. I mean I've seen it before obviously but I was still young and I still didn't understand the emotional magnitude this book contained. I was really blown away. As I finished I wiped my tear-filled eyes and I remember saying to myself, "wow!" I carefully wrapped it in protective bubble wrap and I put it in the backseat of my car. There was just no way that something that valuable was going to go to a storage facility. After all, this book is my history.

One memory I have of this album is with all the moving I have done I have always kept it close. One time I remember my friend Marcia was over and saw me putting it away, "What is that?" she said to me.

"It's my mom and dad's wedding album," I replied.

"Can I look at it? I love looking at wedding pictures," she asked me.

Her being my best friend I said, "Sure! Just be careful with it ok." I let her have it and she sat down and started looking at it. She looked at it with awe in her eyes. I think at times she sniffled it was cute.

After a while she looked up and said, "They look so happy together. I hope one day to get married and look as happy as your mom looks." She went back to looking at them quietly for a bit then finished up and closed the book. She looked over towards me and said, "You know my favorite picture has to be the silhouette. It looks very classy."

I took the book and opened it I looked at that same picture and then I said to her, "You know I think you're right. It is a very elegant picture." Then I put the book back in its place and we went about our day. That is one of the memories that I have of the book.

This album is rich with my parent's history. It causes me to ask questions like how did my mom and dad meet? How did they come to that particular day? When did they know that they wanted to spend the rest of their lives together? I also look and see all my family members and see how they looked. I see some of the people I've grown up around and see how much they've changed. I see how many people were part of my parent's life back then, but now have been left in the past. I see all my family members that like my mom have gone to their rest. Like my grandmother Alice on my dad's side and my cousin Irene. I get to see my grandfather Richard on my mom's side and my great grandmother Margret. All these people that I know to be gone are here still alive and well through these pages. I see all the sub stories that flow through the pages like, there a picture of my mom's twin sister Kathy winking at someone. I'd like to know who that is. This album is

so important to me because in essence I am the result of this book. It started with the wedding and it grew and grew until my mom's love and my dad's love combined into my own conception. Therefore, it's my own personal history. In the future if I have any children, I will pass the book on to them with the hope that they will cherish it as much as I do. The book will be a story book to them telling them not only my life story, but it will tell them of their loving grandparents love story as well.

David Porter, 26, lives in Lawrence, MA. He is working towards a degree in nursing. He enjoys reading and watching movies in his spare time. He was in Clare Thompson-Ostrander's fall 2008 Basic Writing class and loves writing. In fact, he plans on writing a short story in the near future.

The Three F's
by Mark Fanaras

Growing up in Haverhill in the 1960's and 70's was easy for me in my working class neighborhood. I pretty much followed the three Fs; family, friends and fun and not always in that order. That's why my baseball is important to me. It brings back fond memories of my youth.

The baseball itself is just your average baseball that we used in Little League or Babe Ruth. When it was new in 1973, it was made of cowhide, dyed white with the name Rawlings stamped on it. It has a super ball core, tightly wrapped with string so it is as hard as rock. It has 210 red stitches that hold it together. Over the years the color has faded to brownish beige and there are some scuffs on it from playing catch with it on cement. It no longer has that familiar rawhide smell. I love that smell. I also really like the pop sound the ball makes when it hits the catcher's mitt or the crack sound the bat makes when the ball hits it just right.

I was in my early teens the night I got the ball. It was the Babe Ruth League finals. We had a game at Swaseys Field at 6:00. It was the third game of a best of three series against Merrimac. Swaseys was a five minute walk from my house. I spent a lot of time there when I was growing up. I was the starting pitcher that night and was very confident in our chances, because we won the first game in which I was the starting pitcher. We were cruising along leading 7-0 going into the last inning. Three walks and three hits later it was 7-4 with a man on second and two outs. The next batter doubles and I was starting to get a little nervous. As the runner slid into second base the throw came in and he was safe. The second baseman, my friend Mike, who I had played with since minor league, had the ball in his glove and gave me a nod. He wanted me to walk back to the pitcher's mound and pretend to have the ball in my glove. He wanted to try and catch the runner off the base and tag him out; the old hidden ball trick! Unbelievably it worked, the runner stepped off the base and Mike tagged him out to end the game and the series. We celebrated, Mike and I got a game ball and that's the story of how I got this ball.

The ball, which until recently, I had forgotten about, was in a trunk in my parent's cellar. My dad had asked me to, "Throw out some junk," as he called it. "The nerve of that man," I thought. I found the ball and put it in my bureau. It brings back great childhood memories. One thing about my dad, he could be a son-of-a-gun, but like most fathers back then, he worked hard all day and was the sole bread winner. At the end of a long day that was probably the last place he wanted to be, but he never missed a game. It's a great feeling having family there to support you. As I get older I realize how fortunate I was to grow up in a very loving and family-oriented home.

This particular ball has another little story to tell. It was a day or two after we won the game in which the ball was given to me for being the winning pitcher. My friend, The Weasel, as we called him, and I were playing catch. My next door neighbor Maureen had a girl over who I had a crush on. Her name was Janet. They were sunbathing in the backyard by the pool. We were checking them out and they could not see us. So The

Weasel said, "I'll throw the ball over the fence and we'll go get it." From that day on he was no longer known as The Weasel, he was known as The Genius, at least to me. Scott threw the ball over and we went over there and Maureen said, "Are you looking for your ball? I just threw it back over the fence." They knew what we were up to, but how could they resist us; two gangly teenagers with bad acne. I mean they were only human. Anyway, one thing led to another, we started talking, then we were in the pool, and then we went to the movies. Bada bing, I got my first girlfriend. So in retrospect, maybe this baseball actually was responsible for four F's rather than three: fun, family, friends and females.

I took this ball out of my bureau and looked at it. It brought me back to a simpler, fun time in my life. It was a time when it was easy to be a kid. It reminds me of how much fun I had and how lucky I was to have a good family and friends. The ball will go back in my bureau and sit there probably until I pass on. One of my kids will probably be cleaning out the bureau and rounding up all my belongings. Maybe they'll notice the date, 1973, and they will know it was given to me in my youth. Hopefully it will remind them of something good that they had from their youth. My kids will look back and think what a good time they had growing up and how fortunate they were that their father served them well.

Mark Fanaras, 49, and a father of three children, lives in Haverhill, MA. He likes to exercise and officiate at sporting events. He was in Clare Thompson-Ostrander's fall 2008 Basic Writing course. He is a very confident writer as a result. Mark is majoring in Human Services.

Consider it Part of Me
by Hillary Sharpe

When you open the door to my house you will either hear someone playing the guitar, singing, or smell my mom's amazing cooking. Some people might say that this is a house, but for me it is home. Down the hall to the right, in the last room on the left, is my bedroom. In there lays my acoustic guitar, it is my first one that I ever got. I have been playing the guitar and singing for just over 6 years. It is a little scratched, dented, and even a little out of tune, but to me it sounds good. My guitar has so many memories, that I know have helped me become who I am today.

I can remember how I got my guitar; I was thirteen years old, and in the eighth grade. Yes, I was still going through the oh so infamous boy band crazy stage of my life. It was Christmas 2002, I had been thinking of possibly learning how to play an instrument. It was hard because I didn't know what instrument I should play, or more importantly one that I would like playing. So I sat and thought, and thought, and I decided that I wanted to play the guitar. I went to my mom and dad and said, "I know what I want for Christmas, I want guitar lessons." I had this theory that if I asked for guitar lessons, that eventually I would have to get a guitar. Christmas morning had finally come. My brothers and I sat in the living room and passed each other gifts and said thank you to each other. I did realize that I hadn't received a guitar or even lessons that I had hoped for. I was a little sad but there are more important things to focus on at Christmas. We were all packing up our things when my parents said, "Hillary there is an envelope on the tree for you." Sure enough there was. I plucked the envelope off the tree and held it in my hands. I could see the outline of a guitar through the envelope. I slowly ripped open the envelope and there inside was a paper saying I was going to be taking guitar lessons. Well what do you know, my plan worked. I was ecstatic and so happy that I cried, a few days later my parents and I went over to Daddy's Junky Music and picked out an acoustic guitar. I guess you can say that since that day my life hasn't been the same.

My guitar, otherwise known to me as J'orge, is 6 years old, and it means the world to me. Every time that I pick it up the memories that I have had, come flowing back to mind. My guitar is not big, but not small either, it is just right. When I am playing my guitar there are no words that describe how I feel. When I am playing I am so relaxed, and feel so free. The sound is soothing and warm, just like a day at the beach. The neck of my guitar is one of those things that just fit, and let me know that it is mine. My guitar is an acoustic guitar and has curves that when I rest it on my knee it just fits. The front of my guitar is made out of a light colored wood. I don't know what kind it is. The front of my guitar has several dents and scratches on it. I can tell you what almost all of them are from, because some of them have memories also.

People always ask me where I keep my guitar. My guitar is kept in the corner of my room between the closet and my window; there it sits on a black metal stand being cradled, almost like a hand would. If it is not there, it is either on my bed or I am playing it. I keep it in these places, because they are not only safe places, but also very easy to access. Oh yeah, and because it is in my bedroom many songs have been written in my room. That is where I do most of my practicing.

I guess that you can say that my guitar is my comfort item. Not only am I physically attached to my guitar, but I am definitely emotionally attached. A few years

ago I was dealing with some things emotionally in my life, and I know that if I didn't have my guitar as an emotional outlet, I might not be the same person that I am today. I think that being able to write a song about how you are feeling and what you are going through is very important. You can write it down and know that it is off of your chest and that you can move on. I also know that 6 years ago when I started playing and singing I was very shy. I was so shy that I couldn't look people in the face when I met them, because I lacked self confidence and confidence in my abilities, but not so much anymore. Now I am the first person to go up to someone and meet them and give them a hug, or shake their hand.

My guitar holds so many amazing memories, of different events, places, and people that I have met. Definitely my favorite memory is the first time that I played at Maggie May's Pub in Salem, NH . It was my first paying gig and there were so many people that were there. It was all of the people that I care about and love. It is funny because that day while I was loading my car up with my equipment, and all the little last minute things. I remember that I had come down the stairs that lead into the driveway, and was walking to the car. Out of the corner of my eye I saw a flash of blue and yellow, and then I realized that it was a parakeet. My uncle that was there did not believe that I had just found the bird in the driveway, he thought that we had the bird and we were playing a joke on him. We ended up keeping the bird for a few more months, but unfortunately he recently passed away.

Another memory that I will always remember is the first time that I played in front of a large crowd of people. It was spring 2002, at this point I had been playing the guitar for about five months now, and my teacher had asked me if I would like to be in a talent show that they were going to have. Of course I said yes, I mean I had never played in front of people before so I was nervous, but for me it was something new. The song that I chose to sing was "Angel from Montgomery" written by John Prine and sang by him and Bonnie Raitt. My teacher decided that he would sing the male part and play the guitar. I remember that I was the last person that was performing that day. I cannot tell a lie, I was really nervous. I remember taking the stage and then looking into the crowd. There were only about 100 people there, but to me being that it was my first time playing in front of people, it seemed like there were 10,000 people there. Like always, as soon as I started it was great.

The guitar sits in my room holds and will always hold a very special place in my heart. Many people have told me that my guitar is kind of a symbol of who I am, and has definitely made me into who I am today. My guitar has also helped put my dream of being a musician in motion. I already am a professional and hopefully not long until I am a signed artist. Hopefully it will happen in the next 3 to 6 years. With my guitar I have had some of the best times of my life. As I continue to write music and get better at playing my guitar, J'orge, I know that more memories will be made.

Hillary Sharpe, 19, lives in Salem NH. She is majoring in Deaf-Studies. Hillary loves playing acoustic guitar. After taking Melissa Juchniewicz's Basic Writing course in the summer of 2008, she feels good knowing the steps to writing an essay.

A Still Mae Flower Survives the Winter
by Catrina M. Costello

Everyone in their lifetime has an influential person who inspires them in different ways. I believe that my inspiration and driven personality comes from my grandmother, Lila Mae. All her life my grandmother was called by her middle name, Mae. My grandmother is a very big hearted, strong-willed, informative woman with great listening ability.

Now in her late seventies, my grandmother raised a fairly large family with my now deceased grandfather, consisting of six children; four girls, and two boys, one of which is my father. She is a petite woman about five feet, two inches tall, weighing only about one hundred thirty pounds. At an earlier age, she was over two hundred pounds, and her hair was a medium dark brown. She always wore big noticeable earrings, and large prescription glasses with gold frames, which she still wears today. My grandmother has thin curly white hair just above her ears, and ocean blue eyes with blondish almost white eyebrows and eyelashes. Her nose is long, a little pointy at the end, but slightly rounded around the nostrils. Although I guess it depends on which angle you look at her. Her very thin lips are a pale pink, and her chin is fairly wide. Wrinkles around her eyes and freckly face, somewhat show that my grandmother has lived an enjoyable life. My grandmother with her Irish ancestry is quite pale aside from myself, especially compared to the rest of my olive complexion family and their Italian-Indian heritage. Her voice is a little high pitched with a southern accent from North Carolina, where she was born and raised. I believe she resembles the nanny from the cartoon with Sylvester and Tweety, adorable and sweet.

In her earlier years, Mae was known for having a really big heart, not only within our family, but in the community as well. My grandmother was always slaving over the stove in the kitchen. From the kindness of her heart, she would cook dinner for all my aunts, uncles, and cousins. They only lived a couple streets away, so they would visit quite often. Even though pots and pans covered the stove, and the kitchen table was full of various ingredients, she would still take the time to teach me how to cook. She loved to sing, laugh, and play practical jokes on everyone. My grandmother was also very active in the garden. Every season, she could be found outside picking weeds, watering flowers, and planting different vegetables in the garden. I think using her own home-grown crops in the kitchen eliminated some of the costs of spending so much, but she was not in the least bit stingy. She would pick cucumbers, tomatoes, squash, and cabbage. Then without any hesitation, she would walk across the street, and ask the neighbors if they wanted any. My grandmother worked for a shelter that helped adults with disabilities find jobs, and teach them to live normal everyday lives. She was responsible for driving several of these adults to and from their places of employment. On the days she was not behind the wheel, she would commit her time inside the shelter assisting them with everyday tasks, such as cooking or cleaning. My grandmother still has a heart of gold, but unfortunately, she does not have the capabilities to utilize it to its fullest potential anymore.

My grandmother has always had a strong-will to live and to survive. During the winter of 1996, while in her early sixties, my grandmother was in a terrible car accident that left her paralyzed from the neck down. I didn't realize the severity of her condition,

until I had seen the damage to her vehicle. At that moment, I broke down in tears from sadness. My grandmother has been in and out of the hospital several times after being treated for pneumonia, and other various health related issues. My mother and I, along with nursing assistants, would often help my grandfather take care of my grandmother. It wasn't long before they both were placed into a nursing home. My grandfather passed away shortly after from a heart attack. My grandmother now resides in the nursing home alone, spending the majority of her time watching television. She also enjoys playing bingo with help from the nursing assistants. Since she was paralyzed, she has not been able to walk, or do all the activities she used to enjoy. She needs someone to feed her, because she cannot move her arms or hands. My grandmother still has an interest for all southern foods such as; cornbread, grits, and collard greens. It's apparent that her taste buds haven't changed, but her appetite sure has. My grandmother doesn't eat two servings like she used to, instead she eats very small portions. She loves when family brings her home-cooked meals. Although she cannot feed herself, not once have I ever heard my grandmother complain. She is always very thankful and appreciative of everything everyone does for her. I cannot even begin to imagine how it would feel to be paralyzed. My grandmother is beyond strong-willed for being in the position she is in, and has been for thirteen years now.

Even before the accident, my grandmother was an informative lady. She has taught me many things about gardening, one of them being the right time of the season to plant certain vegetables. I remember being out in the garden with my grandmother, helping her out in any way possible. I would clean and organize buckets full of vegetables after carrying them into the house. I learned a lot being outside with just my grandmother and no distractions. My grandmother also showed me how to make grape jelly. She used to have several grape vines that stretched about the length and height of a bus. I would often wander off into the backyard to pick a few grapes for myself. My grandmother's mind is unbelievable with certain moments. She remembers things that have slipped my mind. She remembers my brother and I sneaking out of our bedrooms late at night. We would raid the refrigerator for leftovers. Then we would climb on top of the kitchen table in the dark, and have a late night snack. This was when my parents were living with my grandparents. I believe I was only five years old, and my brother was three at the time. It's just amazing how informative my grandmother is, considering everything she remembers.

These days when I go to visit my grandmother in the nursing home, it is always heartwarming to see her smile. We often have the same conversation. My grandmother always immediately asks me, "How have you been? What have you been up to?"

I reply, "I've been good, just working."

She asks, "Where are you working?"

I explain to her, "I work in the accounting department for a large corporation."

"What type of work do they do?" she asks.

I reply, "Well, you know how dad works for a power plant? The company I work for builds and repairs the refractory on power plant boilers and furnaces. They also do work for manufacturing and waste recycling plants."

She says, "That seems very interesting!"

I reply, "I think so too! There aren't very many companies that do that type of work."

She agrees and asks, "How is your mom? What has she been up to?" My grandmother absolutely adores my mother. Since my parents have been divorced, my grandmother doesn't get to see my mother as much as she used to.

I tell her, "Mom, is doing good. She is still driving the school bus, just like pop-pop used to. I don't know how she does it! Driving around forty rowdy kids every day, but she loves it!"

She says, "Well, I don't know how your grandfather did it either. I guess they both just love kids!"

"Yeah, I guess you're right grandma," I say.

Randomly, she says, "Sieto bello ed astuto."

I ask, "What does that mean?"

She softly says, "You are so beautiful and smart."

I then reply, "Thank you grandma! What language is that?"

She answers, "Italian, silly!"

We laugh after, and I remember she always compliments me in Italian when I come to visit, but I can never remember how to speak it like her. She learned it from my grandfather, whose parents were both from Sicily. It's just amazing how informative my grandmother is, considering everything she remembers.

Now that my grandmother resides in the nursing home, she has become a great listener. At times, she was the life of the party, loud and noticeable, but in a good way. I believe the accident made her a quieter person. My brother and aunts will often have my grandmother visit throughout the year, especially during the holidays. She has to be transported from the nursing home by a special van, equipped with a lift for her wheelchair. The entire family will get together during these visits. Sometimes, my mother will even make a surprise visit. You just can't miss my family's hilarious conversations about past memories. My grandmother is always so content listening to every story told. She just grins and smiles, without saying anything. You can always tell my grandmother is listening to every word, because of her facial expressions.

Although my grandmother has faced some serious challenges in her life, I know in my heart that she has enjoyed every moment of it, because of her personality today. Not only has she taught me many things I will cherish, but she has indirectly influenced me with her disability. She taught me to be thankful, and realize how important the little things in life are, that we often take for granted. My grandmother's big heart, strong will, informative mind, and great listening skills will remain with me throughout my lifetime and beyond.

Catrina Costello is 28 and lives in Amesbury, MA. She is working towards being a certified public accountant. After taking Basic Writing with Jennifer Levesque in spring 2009, she feels "I have improved my ability and now have more confidence." Catrina enjoys cooking and traveling in her spare time.

My Wonderful Surprise
by Kathleen Flemings

My son Wayne changed my life dramatically. At the age of forty-three I found out that I was pregnant. This was the last thing I thought would happen to me at that age. After having Wayne I wouldn't change a thing. Wayne is eight years old, loving, imaginative, and funny.

My son Wayne is a handsome, doe eyed eight year-old. When you look at him he doesn't look like a strong, rugged kid. In fact, when he wears his glasses he looks like a computer geek. Wayne is built just like his father, tall and lanky with no butt. He has thick, wavy, dirty blond hair that turns light in the sun. He has big, beautiful, round, light blue eyes with gorgeous long, dark lashes that every woman dreams of having. When he smiles he has a dimple in each cheek. His fingers are long and thin; they remind me of artist's hands. Every time I smell watermelon it reminds me of Wayne, because his favorite shampoo is watermelon. Wayne has a funny little walk. When he walks he takes a couple of steps and then he does a little hop. Wayne likes to wear jeans with lots of pockets. One of his favorite shirts is blue and gray with a hood, and a dragon on the front. He always has the hood on. His sneakers are black with the laces tucked inside and skulls on both sides of them.

My son is very loving. One particular moment said it all for me. It was a Wednesday night around nine p.m. in August, and Wayne was being fresh and I had to punish him. I took away his Nintendo DS. This was the worst thing I could do to him because he is obsessed with this hand held game. After lots of crying and a temper tantrum, I sent Wayne to bed. Then I went to bed myself. All of a sudden I feel someone rubbing and stroking my face, and I hear, "I love you Mom." I kept my eyes closed so he wouldn't know that I was awake. 1 knew from that moment that even though I had punished him and he was very upset with me, he did truly love me. This really showed me the meaning of unconditional love, and inspired me to be more forgiving.

There are many different sides to my son. He is also very imaginative. As a toddler he was very observant of everything going on around him. He had an imaginary friend that he talked to everyday. This was very amusing to me. Wayne also would go and stand in the corner of the living room every night at around six p.m. He would just stand there and look up at the ceiling. I asked Wayne, "What are you looking at?"

He answered, "Can't you see him?

I asked, "See who?"

Wayne answered, "I don't know."

This was Wayne being very imaginative, or he really did see someone. It was kind of spooky, yet at the same time I realized there are some things that happen in this life that have no explanation.

Wayne is very funny, and it makes me realize that sometimes I am too serious. I get caught up in everyday life. About two weeks ago, after a particularly stressful day, Wayne came up to me in the living room and asked, "What's wrong Mom?" Before I had a chance to answer he was jumping around doing funny dances. He grabbed my hands

and said, "Come dance with me Mom."

I said, "Okay."

At first we were just jumping around. Then I started twirling Wayne under my arms. He tried to twirl me and we crashed into each other and fell to the floor. Before I knew it, I was laughing until my stomach hurt. No medicine in the world could have taken away my stress any better! I learned from Wayne not to take life so seriously, and to stop and smell the roses once in a while.

Having Wayne late in life has been the best thing that could have happened to me. He has kept me young, and he has helped me see things through a child's eyes. Wayne has also given me a second chance at motherhood. There's a twenty-year difference between Wayne and his sister, Shanna. Hopefully this time around, I have gotten some things right. I have quit smoking and have started taking better care of myself so I can be around to watch Wayne grow up. Even when Wayne isn't on his best behavior, I just have to look at that face and know that it is all worth it.

Kathleen Flemings, 51, of Haverhill, MA has 2 children and is majoring in medical billing at NECC. After taking Basic Writing with Clare Thompson-Ostrander in fall 2009 she says, "I now know how to put together a good essay."

A Shining Star
by Suiwen Wen

"Who is the person who influences you the most?" I have been asked this question many times. I still do not hesitate to answer it: "The person is my father." He is a positive man with many good qualities. I have found him to have no bad habits since I was little. "If the upper beam is not straight, the lower one will go aslant," he likes to say this Chinese idiom. He teaches me both in words and by example. In my eyes, he is a perfect father who always sets a good example for his children. His honesty, kindness, and optimism are the most impressive aspects that have influenced me from childhood to adulthood.

My father's name is Xing Ze Wen. He now is sixty-nine years old. He is my grandparents' first child. His first name, Xing, means "star." My grandfather named him in hope that his son would become a shining star in his future life. His middle name, Ze, represents the generation of the family. The last name, Wen, is just from our family heritage. He was a soldier in the South Sea Navy of China when he was young. After he left the army, he worked in a big warship factory. At first, he worked as a technician. Through his effort, he finally became a director in the Human Resources Department ten years later. He retired nine years ago.

My father has a medium-size figure and stands 5 feet 5 inches in height. His hair is a little gray, thin, short, but he is not bald. He has brown eyes with thick eyebrows. When you look at him, you can feel kindness and optimism glitter in his eyes. He needs to wear a pair of far sight glasses when he reads. The wrinkles show on his face, but he still looks radiant because he keeps exercising every day. Whenever he decides to do something, he does not delay it. In addition, he hates tattoos. In his eyes, a person wearing tattoos is not a good person. There is no jewelry on his body except his old watch. His style of dress is very simple. Neatness is his unique requirement. He likes to wear light colored tops because he thinks an old man wearing dark color tops looks older, so a white shirt is usually his favorite top in summer. He always walks with firm footsteps and a straight waist. You can tell he was a soldier. He likes to talk with a loud voice and a hearty laugh. My mother usually says to me, "If your father's voice becomes low, he certainly is sick." Therefore, his voice represents that he is strong and healthy.

When I think of my father, his good qualities race through my mind. One of them is his honesty that teaches me how to become an honest woman. I remember when I was little, there was a simple motto hanging on the wall of our living room -"Honesty is the best policy."

I did not know why he hung it on the wall. He explained to me, "This is my motto. I also want everyone in our family to be honest." He always tells the truth. I never see him hide his mistakes or cheat. If he is sure some problems are caused by him, he will sincerely admit his faults. In addition, he is scrupulous. I remember that he was a director in the Human Resources Department of a big warship factory many years ago. One day, a man who wanted my father to offer him a good job visited my home with valuable gifts. My father talked to him in a friendly way for about one hour. When he left, my father politely said, "Please take these gifts back. You do not need to give gifts to me. If you qualify for the job, I will consider you."

After the man left, I asked my father, "Why did you refuse his gift? Nobody will know."

My father answered seriously, "Nobody will know? He, you and I would know if I received it. This is illegal behavior. If you do not want people to know, you should never do that. Honesty is my principle as a man." I have known honesty is very important since I was little. When I want to tell a lie or cheat, my father's teaching and motto always remind me to give up the wrong thought. I also regard his motto as mine. I use it to guide me in my life.

My father's kindness lets me know the importance of becoming a kind person. He always has a smile on his face. I seldom see him angry. He likes to say, "If you treat people kindly, the people also treat you kindly and respectfully. Kindness makes you live happily." When I was young, my mother liked to blame me when I made a mistake or got a bad grade. On the contrary, my father's attitude was different. He liked to discuss with me why I made the mistake and teach me how to solve it. He usually said, "It is easy for children to make mistakes. But the most important thing for them is to find the mistakes and not to make the same ones again." I was always willing to admit my faults in front of my father because I knew he never blamed or scolded me. Some of my classmates were beaten by their parents when they made big mistakes. So I felt lucky that I had a kind father. In addition, he is very kind to other people. Many years ago, my friend told me a story. When my friend was 10 years old, he was very naughty. He threw a stone at my father and hit him on his forehead. The wound was very close to his eyes and was bleeding. It made my father get three stitches. However, my father never complained about him in this accident. He forgave him because he thought he was just a little boy. He just told him, "It was very dangerous to do this. Remember not to do it again." My friend said that his parents and he were really grateful to my father's generosity and forgiveness. He told me, "I will never forget your father because he is the kindest person I know." Many people like to make friends with him because of his kindness. Wherever he moved, my father easily made many friends. He has won many people's love and respect. I can feel his life is full of happiness. I do my best to become a kind woman because I know kindness can bring me a happy life. My father has proved this fact to me by his kindness. He is a good example.

My father's optimism inspires and teaches me how to face difficulties and problems. He always faced difficulties with a smile. Every time our family was in a difficult situation, my father led the whole family to overcome it using his optimism. He also taught my younger brother, sister and me how optimism is important in our lives. He said, "Optimism can bring you confidence and enthusiasm that will help you overcome difficulties." I remember my family was very poor when I was an elementary student. We usually ate meat two times a week and seldom had snacks. I often felt upset and hungry. I asked him, "Why don't we still have enough food to eat even though you and mother went to work?"

"Our country is still poor. Many supplies of produce are limited. On the other hand, our wages are low. I believe everything will become better," he said confidently.

"Do you feel hungry?" I asked him. I thought he should have the same feeling as I did.

"Sometimes, but we have enough rice and vegetables. This is not a bad life compared to the poorest area," he laughed. I never saw him disappointed and upset with

anything. He liked to teach my brother, sister and me some songs that could inspire us to overcome difficulties. He always said, "If the sky fell down, I would use it as a blanket." He likes to use a positive attitude to live and work. His optimism influences our family members to overcome all the difficulties that happen in our lives. I also want to be an optimist like my father, but I am sometimes a little pessimistic about some things. If I lack confidence in some things, I like to talk to my father. I hope to hear his optimistic laugh and his encouragement. Then I will get rid of my worries. After immigrating to the United States, I found there were too many challenges I needed to face. I worried about many things. I asked myself if I should to stay here. I talked to my father about my situation. He said optimistically to me, "It doesn't matter. Your situation is better than mine when I raised you and your siblings. I believe you can overcome the challenges through your strong will and effort." His optimism can always inspire me whether in the past, present or future.

My father has other good qualities that have influenced me, but I was impressed by his honesty, kindness, and optimism. His traits are like a lighthouse and a compass guiding me to be a person with these qualities. His optimism always encourages and inspires me to overcome my difficulties and problems. I feel a great gratitude to him. Wherever I go, I will keep him in my mind forever. Although my father has suffered poverty and many difficulties in his life, his many successful experiences and good qualities have brought him through a shining life, just like a star.

Suiwen Wen, 40, is originally from China. She is married with a 12-year-old daughter. Suiwen took Basic Writing with Pat Scannell in the fall of 2008. After taking the course she now has more confidence in her writing.

The Trip of a Lifetime
by Justin Campagnone

It was a usual January at Londonderry High. It was cloudy and cold. The snow had frozen into ice and parking in the plateau parking lot was frozen. It was C period in band and the "Pledge of Allegiance" had begun. Some students were taking out their instruments. Most waited till the announcements were over to start taking their instruments out. That was mainly to buy some time and talk to one another. The announcements were covered by the average everyday chit chat. "Did you see that show last night?" or "Did you see what she wore?" You know, the average high school stuff.

I took out my case from my locker, opened it up, and started putting my saxophone together. It had a few dings and its age was definitely showing. It had rust spots on the inside and out, the top of my mouth piece showed where I would friend my teeth, and I had a piece of paper with clear tape around it to create somewhat of a makeshift key pad. Someone took my neck strap, so I took one out of someone else's locker with full intention of returning it. With my instrument all put together, I walked into the band room.

The band room was an addition to the school. It was added after the old band room couldn't handle the size of the band. Our band had around 350 students and each year, we grew larger. It had a shelf along the wall of all the trophies we had won. There were banners of all the places the band gone previously to my arrival. There was a couple from the St. Patrick's Day parade in New York City. We had done that two years in a row and planned on doing it again this year. The chairs were all aligned to where they should have been. If you were to look from the top, they made almost an upside down rainbow. Most kids were sitting down at that point, and I didn't have a chair. I went over to the rack, pulled one out, put it in my assigned spot, and sat down.

Because there were no seniors in the saxophone section, the juniors were firsts, and everyone else were seconds . That went for every other instrument in the class. As a first, you had the sense of being superior. If someone was talking when they shouldn't have been, you could tell them to shut up and they would. You were a first if you could play the tougher music parts. It basically meant you were better.

Everyone continued talking to their friends, or whoever was next to them, for about fifteen minutes. Then we started wondering where Mr. Soucy was. Not many of us cared because the longer he took, the longer we could just hang around. He was usually five to ten minutes late anyways. So we continued talking. The girl next to me was one who watched shows like "The Hills" or "Laguna Beach" and wore Hollister or A&F. She tried to have the "California look." Every sentence from her started with "like," and ended with, "like you know?" It kind of bugged me because she tried too hard.

Eventually, Mr. Soucy entered the room. Mr. Soucy was a fun guy. He always had a smile and made band jokes. He was short and fat, with gray hair. Something was weird about him today though. He came in and silenced the class. He was straight faced. He walked up to his little stand and cleared his throat."I just got a call..." he paused. "It was from the Beijing Olympics committee. They asked our band to perform for the 2008 Olympic Festival."

The class went silent. I could see a few kids mouths even drop. We all couldn't

believe what he just said. "You have no idea what an honor it is to be asked this." He continued, "Three bands in the entire country have been asked to perform. We are so honored to be one of them."

The seriousness was interrupted by a student who decided to bang the gong. A lot of the kids thought it was funny including me. Mr. Soucy even smiled. "Now.. ." he said. "If we were to go, it would be expensive. Each student would have to pay around four thousand dollars." The students happy faces were turned straight in almost an instant. "That would cover everything." he continued. "Air fare, bus, hotel, food, and clothes. There will be a letter to your parents with more information about the trip."

With that, he whipped out his little pointer, whisked it in the air, and told us to take out our St. Patrick's Day music. My stand partner had it out before I sat down. We practiced our music, and about a half an hour later, he told us to pack it up. The average chit chat was now replaced with excitement over the news we had heard. It was sad to hear that some kids already knew that they wouldn't be able to go. I went over to my locker, opened it up, took my case out, and started putting my instrument away. A piece of my sax got stuck, so I had to take out my cork grease (which is as disgusting as it sounds) and tried to loosen up the piece. I slipped it out and put the neck strap in the locker I took it out of. I then talked to my friend Ian.

"Dude!" he said, "China, man. It's gonna be bomb."

I ignored the out of style comment and continued talking to him. We started talking about all the cool things in China: the buildings, the culture, and the food. We joked about it a bit saying that we could just go down to "Master Wok" right down the street and that in China they use rats in their chicken fingers.

The bell rang and students began to flow out of their classrooms. Immediately, people started to run to their friends to tell them the news. It was a pretty cool thing to hear, and brag about.

Ian and I ran into our friend Jongwon. He was hanging outside his next class. We told him the news and he was pretty pumped. We walked to our next class and the enjoyment was broken. Ian turned to me and asked, "So what do you think you're gonna do to get the money for the trip?"

I hadn't thought about it till then. That's when it hit me. All the joy of going on the trip, all the different things I was going to do, all the people I would meet, depended on whether I got a job. I went home and told my parents about it. They were thrilled. They said they would help pay for part of it and that made me feel better.

In the end, finding a job and saving up the money was well worth it. The experience was a once in a lifetime deal.

Justin Campagnone, 18, a Liberal Arts major, was a student in Joanna Fortna's Basic Writing class in fall 2008. His hobbies include snowboarding and skateboarding. Justin enjoys writing and thinks it's not as hard as he thought it would be. He is more enthusiastic about writing than ever!

The Girl Who Cried Wolf
by Gail DiPalma

In nineteen sixty-two, I was seven years old and attending the Proctor Elementary School on Hudson Street in Somerville, Massachusetts. I was in Mrs. McCarthy's third grade class and doing quite poorly, I might add. Everyone else in class knew what was going on, except me. At least, that's how it felt. Years later, I discovered my parents enrolled me in school a year before my time. I was a whole year younger than my classmates. It was no wonder I felt lost in class. School was tough enough and I certainly didn't need another disadvantage. My mother had a lot of kids and I must have gotten lost in the shuffle somehow. If I only knew then what I know now, I would realize a person's worth can be measured by one's credibility.

Mrs. McCarthy was an old woman, with red curly hair and her face was always beet red. She was very rotund and not very tall. She would shuffle around the classroom and make noises with her lips, "pssst, pssst, pssst." It was her way of keeping us kids from talking. You would know she was close by, because she wore awful smelling perfume. It really stunk. She was a very nervous person, and made the class very tense also. Maybe it was me, but I barely understood her when she spoke.

One day in class, we were told by Mrs. McCarthy that the entire school was going to have a hearing test. All thirty of us children looked at each in confusion; we didn't know what that entailed. We would be called down to the basement for our hearing test one grade at a time. After lunch, it was our turn. Although we were getting very curious, we could see the other grades coming back from their hearing test and they looked perfectly fine. We were told to get in line, alphabetical order. We marched like little soldiers down to the school basement."Pssst, pssst single file, children," chirped Mrs. McCarthy.

Once we were downstairs, they told four kids at a time to sit at a long table. We were instructed to put these funny looking headphones on our heads. The professional hearing test man began explaining what he needed us to do, to have a successful hearing test result. "When you hear a high pitched beep, I want you to raise your hand."

It sounded pretty simple to me. The hearing test man sat at a separate table and on his table was a big electric box-like machine, with all kinds of knobs and graphs. I started thinking, this hearing test might be fun. It's better than sitting in class. He started with the boy next to me. Joey raised his hand every time he heard a beep."Good boy, Joey. You can go back upstairs to class."

Now it was my turn. I heard the high pitched beep. I heard it very clear, but I didn't raise my hand. I heard another beep, but again, I didn't raise my hand."Are you sure you're not hearing a beep?" asked the hearing test man.

"Nope, I don't hear anything," I said. They continued to test me and I continued to lie about hearing the high pitched sound. They were making such a fuss over me. I was getting all this attention for what seemed like a long time, but was in reality probably ten minutes. I started to feel bad about lying, but at the time it felt wonderful. All these people were making me feel so special somehow. I felt like I mattered to someone and these people didn't even know me.

I was sent home from school that day with a letter to my mother. It was a sealed letter, so I didn't know what it's contents were. My mother never said anything to me about it, so I thought everything was fine. The next day Mother told me I wasn't going to school. We were going somewhere, but she wouldn't tell me where. My Aunt Caddy came over and the three of us went for a ride in the car, which was very unusual. We got to our destination fairly quickly. I remember walking into a big building. I still didn't know why we were there.

We walked into what seemed like a doctor's office. I saw a big chair with iron wires and all kinds of electrical things on it. I never saw such a scary chair. My mother was being very sneaky and I was getting a bad feeling about this day. All of a sudden a huge creepy doctor came in the room. That's when my mother told me the doctor was going to blow my ears out. What does that mean? What was she saying? I couldn't believe my ears, but since I didn't have a hearing problem, I heard her all too clearly. I started to panic. I tried to explain to them that I was only kidding about not hearing the beep at the hearing test the day before. They wouldn't believe me. My mother and my aunt grabbed me and strapped me down in that big scary chair. I began screaming hysterically, "I was only kidding! Ma. Please believe me! I heard the beep! I heard the beeeeep! I heard the beeeeeeep"

No one would believe me. I was no match for them. I was only seven. My mother had her knee in my belly and my aunt held my hands down while the doctor proceeded to blow my ears out with this loud deafening suction machine. It was the most pain I had ever experienced in my life. I was screaming so hard I couldn't catch my breath.

I cried for three days after that visit to the doctor. I wasn't sure if I was crying because it hurt so much, or because my mother wouldn't believe me. See, that's the trouble with lying. Once you tell a lie and get caught, your credibility goes right out the window. I learned quite a powerful lesson that day. I wasn't sure why I lied at the time, but today it makes perfect sense to me.

Looking back at my childhood is not easy for me, but it didn't take an army of psychiatric doctors to come up with a mental diagnosis. I was just a typically neglected kid who was either being called stupid or was made to feel invisible. No wonder I was looking for attention. That little seven year old was screaming on the inside, "Hey, somebody notice I'm alive!" It's that simple, really. I lied, because it gave me what I was searching for, somebody to pay attention to me. Unfortunately, there are millions of us out there. Oh, what the heck. It's not so bad. The experiences of my childhood gave birth to my uncanny sense of humor. Where do you think most comedians come from, anyway? They're called survival skills. Lucky us, we have them, by the truck load.

Believe me. I wouldn't recommend it, but something good came out of that

unforgettable experience, because today, no matter what the situation, I never lie. I wouldn't tell this to just anyone, but If I tell a lie, my neck breaks out in big red botches. It's a dead giveaway.

I have long since forgiven my mother for that dreaded day at the doctor's office. It's amusing how life twists and turns. My mother is eighty six years old and she is totally deaf in both ears. I, on the other hand can hear perfectly well.

"Hey Ma, I know a great doctor…Let me make you an appointment."

Gail Di Palma , 53, lives in Malden, MA. Gail currently works as a barber and a stand-up comic. She is pursuing a career in drug and alcohol counseling. She took Mike Wilcomb's summer 2008 Basic Writing class and loved learning to write. "I love seeing a blank page turn into a warm funny story."

Leading to the Future
by Jessebel Graceki

It was a typical school day when I was called down to my counselor's office for a meeting. I was already in a bad mood because of a college rejection letter I had received the night before from the University of Massachusetts Lowell. I wasn't in the mood to talk to anyone that morning until the conference I had with my counselor. It changed my perspective on life and the way I make decisions in the future.

Lisa Savastano-Brady was the name of my counselor. She had been a counselor at the middle school I attended and then transferred to the high school I graduated from when I was a sophomore. Mrs. Brady is a loving and caring person. She was there for me when I most needed her. Whenever I needed help, she was there, consulting me in every way she could.

When I was a senior in high school, I was very confused. I was extremely stressed out and lost. I had just gotten back from getting home schooled by a tutor because I was on maternity leave. When I arrived back to school it was time for me to get back on track and apply for colleges. My plan at the time was to attend a four year college. My counselor had me apply to all the four year colleges that were near Lawrence, Mass because I didn't have transportation to go further. So I did. I unfortunately received letters from all the colleges I applied to, and didn't get accepted to any of them. I was disappointed. I even cried. I scheduled a meeting with my counselor, Mrs. Brady, and we had a long talk. “What's wrong honey?” she asked me.

I'm so stressed out...I feel like giving up, I can't believe I didn't get accepted to any of the colleges I applied to," I replied.

“Well Jessebel, you're a smart girl, and you're not going to give up now, after all the hard work you've done in the past years. You need to keep trying.” She consulted me in every way she could. She then gave me some options. “Why don't you apply at NECC, or Middlesex?” She asked.

“No,” I said. "I don't want to go to a two year college, especially in Lawrence, I want to attend a four year college because I don't want to be transferring from school to school. Do you understand where I'm coming from?" I was so annoyed at all these college matters and was just about to give up until she explained them to me.

“Okay Jessebel, I want you to look at me and listen to me carefully.” I looked at her with disappointment, and she went on. “There are times in life when there are limits of choices to make. You can't always get what you want, when you want it. I understand that this is beginning to get a little stressful as a mother and also as a student. I wish I could help you, but this time it's up to you. I gave you an option of going to a two year community college, now you need to stop being so stubborn and accept it. I, as your counselor, want the best for you, and I know you want the best for yourself as well. Take my advice, and as I say, you will appreciate it in the future and you will remember this day when it happens.”

I looked at her and thought about it. “Maybe she *is* right. I *should* stop being so stubborn and do something I don't really want to do for once.”

Making decisions in life is sometimes stressful. I try to make the right choice when I need to make a decision in life, but it doesn't always turn out how I expect. My expectations are always positive, of course. Although they sometimes turn out to be

negative, I need to understand that the outcome of my decisions may differ.

"You know what Miss, I'm going to take your word, I will stop being so stubborn and listen to what you finished telling me. It's that it is hard to do something I don't feel happy doing, but since that's my final option, I'll do it," I said to her. I went behind her desk and gave her a big hug.

"You can do it Jessebel. I know you can," she told me with confidence.

"I will take your advice in consideration and try not to be so stubborn in life," I said to her. I walked out of her office with a smile on my face.

This meeting with my counselor opened my eyes and has enabled me to think positively about the decisions I make. I now look at the consequences of my options and think about the positive and negative outcomes before I make my decisions in life. This strategy prepares me for any negative outcomes that I will encounter in the future.

I've learned a lot from Mrs. Brady. She taught me to look at other options in life. She enabled me to be a strong woman and to try as hard as I can for what I want to achieve. I learned not to be so obstinate in life by attending this meeting. When making a choice in life, I now look at it a different way. I try to accept things I don't want, if my way is not an option. This day changed my attitude drastically. It was in a matter of one day. Who would ever think one day would somewhat change a person's personality, like this day changed mine.

The following week I visited NECC. I grabbed an application and began the process of applying to this two year college that I stubbornly didn't want to attend. I got accepted and began classes in September. I felt so happy and relieved that all this tension was finally over. I actually like it now. It isn't how I thought it would be. My counselor gave me the capacity to make the right choice, even thought it wasn't my first choice.

Mrs. Brady enabled me to look beyond what I have in hand, and accept the things I really don't want in life. I learned a whole lot from my counselor. She taught me so much about life and helped me so much in my college matters. Being a mother and a full time student isn't easy, but Mrs. Brady made me think otherwise. She would constantly tell me not to give up. The lesson I learned on that typical high school day formed me into a better person. The meeting with my counselor led me to change my perspective on life and the way I would make my decisions in the future.

Jessebel Graceki, 18, lives Lawrence, MA with her son Maison, and is studying at NECC to be a certified public accountant. After taking Pat Scannell's fall 2008 Basic Writing course, she feels she can write about anything and do great.

Road to Redemption
by Ida Rosario

There's one vivid memory that till this day I think about several times a day. That dreadful, hot, humid day was August 19, 2003. I found myself doing exactly what I had vowed never to do. It all started with a signature and an oath. After I took that oath I started panicking. I was thinking to myself, "What did I get myself into?!!!" I can always flee the country. I can go to Canada. I just wanted to make everything and everyone go away. I wanted to vanish, disappear, or be abducted by aliens. I just didn't want to go through it. I was scared of change and I was scared how my life was going to change with just a signature. It's a day when I got to know that there was a feeling beyond fear, some indescribable word that cannot be found in any dictionary known to men.

I remember not being the only one feeling like this. A guy that was with me felt the same way. Jorge Pinero was a Puerto Rican going through the exact same emotions, except he was calm. "Hi my name is Jorge Pinero and I just joined the US Coast Guard," said Jorge.

I replied, "I'm Ida Rosario and I also joined the US Coast Guard, and I'm scared senseless."

He could tell that I was nervous because every extremity was shaking, my voice couldn't be controlled, and my laughter was as fake as press on nails. Plus I probably had the look of a deer about to get hit by a car. "Don't be scared. You are not going to be alone in this situation. There are going to be a lot of people like you and me over there," Jorge said to me.

"It's easier said than done. Tell that to every part of my body that is shaking and make my nerves believe that," I replied with a little bit of aggravation and sarcasm.

"Well I feel the same way you do, but we need to save the energy for later, for when the really rough part comes. Right now just try to enjoy the last few hours you have left in Puerto Rico," Jorge said to me trying to calm me down a bit.

I just wanted to slap his mouth shut at this point. I didn't want to be calmed down. All I wanted was to go back home. I wanted to see my mother, my sisters, my nieces, my nephew, my bird, and my cat. At that point, I wanted to see anything that was familiar to me. I wanted my life back, but I knew that was impossible. "How can you be so calm, and talk to me so nonchalantly, when you are about to leave everything that you have ever known behind?" I asked him with pure anger.

"We are only going to be in boot camp for 8 weeks. You are going to see your family again before you know it. You just need to relax and enjoy yourself. You make it seem like you are going to prison. Just think that something great is going to come out of this," he said to me trying to convince me and him that everything was going to be alright.

While he was being Dr. Phil I was trying to block him from getting in my head. I wanted to grieve. I wanted to cry. I wanted to scream. I wanted to run. At this point I sensed a panic attack arising. My whole body started shaking violently. I was near hysterics. Tears were pouring out of my eye sockets. I could barely breathe. For just one moment I wanted the whole world to stop.

"You need to calm down. You cannot arrive at Cape May doing things like this. You'll be there forever. You already signed the papers and you took an oath. We are at the airport and in a few hours we'll be in Philadelphia, and whether you like it or not you are owned by the US Government for the next four years. So I suggest you get your act together and start getting used to the idea that things have changed, that your life has

changed. You may not see it now, but it's one of the best things that has happened to you. I know you are stronger than this. Just don't let fear take the best of you!" Jorge said to me while looking at me with anger and at the same time with sympathy.

"I just don't know if I can get through this. I feel as if I made a mistake," I said still crying, just not sobbing like before.

We sat side by side not talking for a very long time. About 20 minutes had passed when another victim of the US Government approached us. His name was Joel Pereira and he was excited to join the US Coast Guard. He was Brazilian, but he had been living in Puerto Rico for several years. "Hey guys, are you here to go to New Jersey?" Joel said to us in this funny thick accent.

"Yes we are," I said trying to avoid anymore conversation with him or anyone who arrived.

"You guys look like you are regretting joining or got into some type of argument," he said smiling with a devious look.

"We are nervous, that's all, just like any normal person would be in a situation like this," Jorge replied to Joel in a very irritated tone, not liking the mocking Joel was doing.

All three of us sat in the airport for the next 2 hours with just a few words. I didn't want to really make friends. I just wanted to be left alone with my thoughts. We boarded the plane at about 10:45 and we had to sit together which was difficult to avoid conversations, especially Joel who simply wouldn't shut up. I literally wanted to suffocate him with my pillow. I tried falling asleep but my nerves were just too jittery for me to close my eyes. At the same time I wanted to get there and get everything over with. Boy was I in for a surprise!

We arrived at the Philadelphia airport at about 1400. We took a bus to Tracen Cape May, NJ. It was the longest drive of my life. My thoughts were erratic. I actually didn't talk to anyone on the ride to the US Coast Guard training facility. I wanted to be left alone with my thoughts, whatever they were.

I remember it was dark when we got there to the training center. I don't remember the exact time, but I remember that my heart was beating at a million beats per minute. I was sweating profusely and all I could do was shake and stutter. To make matters worse, I was carrying a huge heavy bag. I had to carry this bag around the base, actually drag it around the base. To top it off we had to empty everything out and set aside the essentials. Everything to me was essential. "Where the (bleep) you think you are going? Are you on a (bleeping) vacation?" One of the company commanders yelled at me in a very demonic tone.

"Nonnnnno ssiiiir," was all I could say.

"I'm gonna give you five seconds to get off this bus and you have already spent three. Get off the bus, right now. You better move and form a perfect line out there and you better be quick or you're gonna be wishing you had never arrived in this place!" one of the company commanders said sounding very demonic with the nasty, scary deep voice, and using all that colorful language. Every other word was an actual bleep. "From now on you don't have first names. You're Seaman Recruit whatever (bleep) last name is. You understand," said the same Company Commander.

"Ssssiiir yyeeesss Sssiiiirr," I said stuttering uncontrollably.

"'What's your name?" asked the Company Commander.

"Iddda Rosssaarriio," I managed to say after what seemed forever.

"Wroooooooong," was the answer I got from the Company Commander. "Since you have difficulty remembering what I have said to you, you and your shipmates are going outside for some fun. By the time I'm through with you guys you'll forget to forget; you'll remember every single thing that is said to you even if it's meaningless. You'll remember forever," said the company commander with a look of pure evil, as if he got a kick out of torturing people.

After an hour of getting our behind handed to us, I made mental notes to never forget what each company commander had to say. We were shown to our barracks where we had to shower, be ridiculed some more, and finally get ready for bed. As I lay in bed that night I was thinking of the days to come. I felt like running away, going AWOL. I knew that was the dumbest thing that I could possibly do. I had to face my fears and be strong. I decided to put a mental block on fear for the next 8 weeks. I knew that if I did what I was told and when I was told I would be fine. We did get reprimanded every day. It was part of the training. I just never took it personally, and that helped me a great deal. Plus, swimming in the morning also helped with the stress and all. After the 8 weeks had gone by I was really proud of my accomplishments.

I became stronger physically and mentally. I discovered that I could possibly do anything that I put my heart into. I vowed I would never join the Armed Forces because I wouldn't be able to handle it. I felt I was not strong enough. Boy was I wrong! I am stronger than what I thought I was. I'm fearless, and I certainly found out what patience is. I worked with a lot of stress, but I learned to keep it under control. All in all I found my inner and outer strength and my limits which are endless. It's amazing because while I was in boot camp I thought I was going to end up in a looney bin, but instead that was the beginning of journey of self discovery that I can't imagine not going through what I went through those four years and being the person that I'm today. Every time I'm faced with a tough situation I always remember my experience in boot camp, and I tell myself if I made it out of there I can make it anywhere. It's a great experience to have, and this is why I went from active duty to reserves.

Ida Rosari, 27, is a fiber optic assembler who lives in Lawrence, MA. She is majoring in chemistry and is pursuing a career in Chemical Forensics. After taking Jennifer Levesque's spring 2009 Basic Writing course, she is more confident doing essays. "I enjoy writing a lot more now."

A Daily Routine
by Daniela Tavares

Is there a form of media you need to either jump start your day or even end your day with relaxation? The media I use daily is the Internet. I started using the Internet when I was just about twelve years old. My parents decided to buy a desktop for the house. It started from looking for information for school to talking with friends. I feel like I'm always in need of browsing for something. Some major ways I use the Internet is communicating with friends, looking for information, and shopping online.

One way I use the Internet is to communicate with friends by using MySpace. I never knew about MySpace until I heard about it from my friends in high school. Then I decided to make a profile to see how it would be. I knew my mother didn't allow me to have one because she heard bad things can happen. Even though I knew she didn't want me having one I decided to make one anyways. I would always go to my friend's house after school and see if I had any new messages or friend requests. I slowly learned how to design my page and even comment on others pages. I would say I started to get addicted to always going on and seeing what everyone was up to. One day I was searching for some old friends from my middle school and realized they all had one too. I decided to add them as friends and since that day I keep in touch with them. Even though they still live in Somerville and I moved away, we now have a way of communicating through MySpace. It has influenced me because I probably wouldn't have found them and kept in contact with them for all these years and many more to come. I personally like having a MySpace account. There is just so much to keep me occupied.

Another way I communicate through the Internet is by using AIM because it is cheaper than using my cell phone. AIM is a way to communicate with new or even old friends. I'm always on my AIM account chatting with my friends. I love to keep in contact with some of my old friends from middle school and even some that are heading to different colleges. Since I have graduated from high school a lot of my friends are attending schools in different parts of Massachusetts. So since I don't get to see them I know I can still talk with them over AIM. My mother would say I am addicted to it because I am signed on 24/7, but it's just cheaper too because talking with them in the daytime would kill my minutes.

An important way I use the Internet mostly is by looking up information for different classes in school. For example, I tend to use the webpage Yahoo because I feel I can search for information and even check some emails. I just find it so interesting the things I can find out on the Internet nowadays. I have been using Yahoo since I first used the Internet. It's so important because I can find so much information on there. One day as I was planning a group trip to go to Canobie Lake I decided to look up the weather for the following weekends. On the upcoming weekend it said it was going to be sunny and high 70s, so I figured it would be a great day to go. I felt that if I didn't have the Internet to help me plan that beautiful day then it would have been bad. Even though you could check the news many people don't have time to listen to the whole show until they get to

the weather. It would just be so much easier to type in your place or zip code and find out in minutes.

Shopping online is also another important resource of using the Internet. It's a good way for me to stay home rather than wait in the long lines. Instead I could just be home in my pajamas having my morning coffee browsing eBay or any other online store. There isn't a closed sign on the Internet stores so I can shop at my convenience. I can buy any item with just a click and a credit card. It beats those crazy salesmen bugging me every ten minutes. My mother loves shopping online so she decided to take up eBay as a little job on the side. She now sells children clothes and always buys a lot of things. You can get a lot more than in stores. I think it is a great thing and now I can see the benefit of shopping online. I have also bought things on eBay. Once I wanted to buy a couple tickets for my family because we all like going to the games. I actually got really good seats for a cheap price. I also get a rush when buying them because I have people bidding against me who also want those tickets.

Even though the Internet has a lot of good things that come out of it, you also need to be careful. You think shopping online is a faster way and no hassle but it could turn out bad. When entering those credit card numbers and all that important info it could lead to a bad thing. They could over-charge and you might not get your package on time. How about when you're looking up information for that important information? Could you get the wrong information from that website? So believe me the Internet does have its ups and downs.

All in all, the Internet influences me in many ways. The Internet is a daily routine for me from waking up in the morning looking up the weather for the day to right before I go to bed checking my emails. It helps me communicate with friends, cut down on phone calls, locate information, and shop. If we didn't have the Internet in our lives today, I wonder how many of us would be spending our days or even finding things out. I believe the Internet has made a lot of things come easier to us.

Daniela Tavares, 18, was a student in Chris Pike's fall 2008 Basic Writing course. Daniela is majoring in nursing and lives in Haverhill, MA. After taking the course she feels that she is "better at expressing myself and my thoughts."

The Wonderful World of Anime
by Amanda Pelletier

Anime, Japanese cartoons, is a huge part of my life. I have been watching anime since I was a child, but did not really get into it or notice its impact on my life until about a year and a half ago. Now, pretty much all I watch is anime. Any chance I get to become involved in a new anime I take. It has influenced me in many ways since I started getting into it. Anime teaches me about a different culture, connects me to others, helps me focus, and relaxes me.

When I was younger I used to watch the anime shows *Pokemon* and *Yu-Gi-Oh.* Then as I got older, I stopped watching anime. When I entered high school, however, my interest in anime returned. I would hear people talking about an anime and I would get curious about it. I would go home, look it up on the TV Guide on my DVR, and watch it. Another way I got into anime again was by reading the Manga, a written version of an anime. I would help out the school librarians and reshelf books for them. I would reshelf mangas and get curious about them. Then I would start to read one, and really enjoy it. After I finished reading one I would go home and look up the anime version and watch it. Those two ways connected me to anime again.

First, anime teaches me about a different culture while I watch. To me it is important for me to learn about a different culture because it gives me a chance to see how people in a different part of the world live. Most of the animes I watch are about high school students. While I watch, I learn all kinds of differences between high school life in America and high school life in Japan. I remember once when I was sitting in my room, watching the show *Fruits Basket,* and the episode I was watching showed the students getting ready for the annual culture festival. I was amazed because it seemed like such a big thing for the characters, but I had never heard of it before. I had also noticed other differences such as that the students had to wear uniforms every day. However, one of the big differences is that in Japan, high school is only three years long, as opposed to four years in America. It makes me wonder where the extra year went since they still graduate at the same age as us. I really have learned a lot about the Japanese culture from watching.

Also, anime connects me to others. I am shy and it is hard for me to make friends. Anime has helped me form friendships with people I normally would not interact with. It has given me something to talk about with others. I know a lot about it, so I am more confident discussing it. I just seem to bond with people that share my love for anime. In high school there was even a club for people who loved anime. We met every Thursday after school and we would just hang out and watch anime for a couple hours. Sometimes they would not even be in English! Being in the club really helped me make friends that love anime like I do. Now, I have friends that will not look at me like I have three heads if I start rambling on about a cool anime I have just watched. Even outside of Anime Club I have been able to make friends through anime. My junior year of high school I took a class called Project Adventure. One day in class I was talking to my friend Bobby and I happened to mention that I had been watching *Fruits Basket* and it was my new favorite show. My friend had no idea what I was talking about but a girl named Christine did. She said, "You like *Fruits Basket?"*

"Yeah, it's awesome," I responded. We had never really spoken before but once

we started talking we could not stop. It turned out that *Fruits Basket* was her favorite show too. We even had the same favorite characters. After that, we talked about it every day and she even made me a bracelet just like the one my favorite character wore. Anime really has connected me to so many different people.

Next, anime helps me focus when I have an assignment to do. Often times I will have trouble getting focused enough to do my homework. I start doing an assignment and then I just space off and I am unable to finish it. Then I discovered that if I put on an anime show I have already watched it will help me focus. The show works as familiar background noise and stops me from getting bored and letting my mind wander from what I am working on. Also, if I get stuck it gives me something to focus on for a minute. Once, I had a huge report to write for my Wild West class. I hate history so I was not looking forward to writing it. Then I sat down with my laptop and started working on it with the anime show *Bleach* playing in the background. Before I knew it I had finished writing the report. I ended up getting an A on the paper. I thought it was great how much I was able to focus just by having that show playing while I worked.

Lastly, anime relaxes me. Whenever I am having a bad day or am stressed out I will sit down and watch my favorite episodes from my favorite shows. It always makes me feel better. Once, when I got in a huge fight over something stupid with my best friend Elizabeth, I went home and started watching anime. The show was *Oban Star Racers.* Watching it calmed me down and helped me relax and reassess the situation. It also helped that the characters were in a similar situation as me. They too were fighting about something stupid. By the end of the episode, they ended up being friends again. After watching that I decided to take a page out of their book and make up with my friend. Now, everything is back to normal. However, it probably would not have been if I had not watched that show and been calmed down enough to reassess the fight.

The only bad thing about anime is I tend to get obsessed. I get into a show and all I want to do is watch it and nothing else. One weekend, there was a *Naruto* marathon on. They were playing all of the episodes. All weekend I sat and watched the show. On Monday I went into school and realized that I had been so obsessed with the show that I had forgotten to do my homework and study for a test. I then had to scramble to get my homework done and ended up getting a bad grade on the test. If I had not been so obsessed I probably would have gotten a better grade. Now, if I think that a show will be a distraction, I just do my homework before the show comes on.

Anime teaches me about a different culture, connects me to others, helps me focus, and relaxes me. If it were not for anime I probably would not have half the friends I have now. I also would not have done as well in school. No matter how old I get I am sure that anime will continue to be a big part of my life.

Amanda Pelletier is an 18-year-old student from Hampton, NH. After taking Clare Thompson-Ostrander's summer 2008 Basic Writing course she feels less nervous about writing and "likes writing now." Amanda enjoys reading and drawing during her spare time.

An Open Window
by Maria Jimenez

Have you ever been in a country where the media has been censured? I had that experience when I was a teenager and lived in a communist country. Newspapers, national TV, and radio stations were nationalized by the government and lost their freedom of expression. The news was manipulated and all foreign publications were prohibited to circulate in the country. The mail was also censured, and almost nobody received letters from other parts of the world. International phone calls were very difficult to connect. Furthermore, movies and cartoons were carefully selected and they had to be compatible with the communist ideology. In one word, the Cuban people were in complete isolation. At that time, the radio became the only contact I had with the world outside the island. The radio helped me to be informed about what happened all over the world, to access the music of my generation, and to educate myself.

First, I listened to the news to be informed. For example, I knew about what really happened in the Vietnam War through the radio, and I compared the international stories I listened to with the stories narrated by the Cuban government. I was able to look at both sides of the conflagration and make my own opinion. I also learned about international conflicts like the one between Israel and the Palestine nation. The news in my country blamed Israel as the responsible party and denied any responsibility to the other party. However, I understood that the Palestines also wanted to force the Hebrews to move out from the land they had. I also spent many days listening to the Watergate case which was one of the biggest presidential scandals.

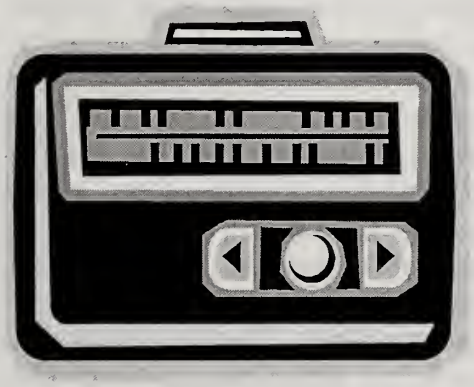
Furthermore, I listened to the multiple discoveries that were taking place in the world, and I updated myself this way. For example, in 1966 we just had black and white TVs in Cuba, and one day I heard that technicians had invented a color TV. The new technology replaced the old one and those black and white TVs became obsolete for the rest of the world. I got very excited about watching TV in color; however, I saw the first one 30 years later in 1992. In the same vein, I heard about computers, but I could not have any idea how important the computers were until the end of 1996 when, finally, I had a computer in my job.

Listening to the news became special moments that I shared with my grandmother Maria. Every night she came to my room, and sat down on my bed waiting very excitedly for the news. We tuned into the Miami radio stations and we listened to the "voice of the exile." Even though the news was our major goal, there were other programs that we listened to which satirized the Castro brothers in a very funny way and made jokes about the real situation of the people in the island. I remember "La Esquina de mi Barrio," in English, "A Comer in my Neighborhood", which made fun of facts like that we, the Cubans, had a notebook to ration food. The stations hired a lot of comedians that we knew that had abandoned the island and worked for the program. My grandmother and I laughed a lot with those jokes about our real conditions in our homeland, and that was one of the best ways to overcome the sadness and fears of that time for us.

In addition, I listened to music on the radio that I did not have access to in my country. It was the year 1968, and I was in high school. There was a big music movement that had spread all over the world. The leaders of this movement were The Beatles, but in my country that music was prohibited because it was considered a dissident element for

the new generation. I was part of that generation, and from the first time I heard the song, "Mr. Postman," I felt the emotions of happiness from the music and became a fanatic of The Beatles. However, listening to the music was extremely risky and I had to put a pillow over my head and the radio when I was in my bedroom with all the windows and doors closed in the house.

There were different punishments for people that were caught listening to American radio stations. Some people had to be in jail for months, others just had a trial and the punishment was a public or private warning, depending on how many times you had been caught doing it or what kind of political antecedents you had. I went to a camp meeting with my school, and my best friend Elisa brought her radio. In the evening time, when almost everybody was outside having fun, she went to her bed and tuned the radio to the prohibited station. A teacher that was walking around the building heard the music through a window, and immediately ran to see if she could find who was listening to that music. The building was a long cabin with lodging for sixty girls. One of the girls outside who noticed what was happening and was closer than the teacher, ran faster and told Elisa. I did not know where she threw the radio, but by the time the teacher got to her bed she was clean. Later that night, we thanked God that nothing was found in Elisa's place because if that had happened surely she would be expelled from school. To educate myself, I learned English from the radio with my father in an informal way. We found "The Voice of America" with "The Special English," an educational program. The speakers had very soft and calm voices and they spoke more slowly than in other transmitters in English. I loved the program even though I could not understand very much English, but my father translated the stories to me. I learned about Native American cultures, about how exciting the Niagara Falls were, and many other things. The fact that I had heard English from the radio for years helped me to be familiar with the language when I came to the USA in 1998.



The radio saved my life when I was a teenager. The information I got through it helped me to develop my identity because I could listen to the news from all over the world and get a different perspective from it. Also, I met The Beatles, an important musical group, through the radio which otherwise would not have happened without the radio. Finally, I exposed myself to the language I wanted to learn. The radio inspired me to have faith in the future. Through the radio, I knew that there was another world totally different from the one I was confined to leave. I knew that one day I would be part of that world, but meanwhile, I could reach that world through the radio.

Maria Jiminez, 53, of Lawrence, MA is aiming towards a career as a nurse. She took Basic Writing with Kassie Rubico in the spring of 2009 and "discovered a passion for writing" after taking the course.

My Favorite Rhythm
by Angelica Cruz

Music is something that has always been in my life. Ever since I can remember I have always enjoyed it and danced to it. There are a lot of Bachata singers I love to listen to. Bachata is part of my culture. I grew up listening to other types of music, but Bachata has always been my favorite. Some of the reasons why Bachata is my favorite type of music are because it reminds of my father, the songs are very sentimental, I love dancing to it, and it is part of my roots as a Dominican.

Bachata music involves a couple of traditional instruments. These instruments are usually used in Spanish cultures such as Dominican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Mexican and most of the Spanish culture. The musicians who play Bachata use the guitar, which adds rhythm to Bachata. There is also the bongo. The bongo is two small drums attached together. The bongo brings a beat to Bachata. There is also a guira used in Bachata. A guira is a metal cylinder instrument with a handle to hold. It has little poked holes from the inside out and it has a scraper. When you scrape the scraper to the metal with the holes, it adds a very unique sound to the Bachata. The musicians who play Bachata also play the piano for more rhythm. These instruments playing together form a very enjoyable type of music which is my favorite type of music, Bachata.

I love listening to Bachata when I'm thinking about my father Jose Cruz. My father and I get along great. I love talking to him on the phone, and I miss him a lot. There is a Bachata singer that reminds me so much of my father. The Bachata singer's name is Frank Reyes. Frank Reyes does not remind me of my father because of anything physical but because of the way he expresses himself. My father has used the words of his songs while explaining to me some difficulties of life. The song my father used to console me was "Quien Eres Tu?" which means, "Who Are You?" I used to live with my aunt here in the United States and we went to the Dominican Republic to visit the family but most importantly my father. When we got to the Dominican Republic my aunt was saying some negative things about me. I was so mad because, I knew that it wasn't true. I couldn't help it and I started to cry.

My dad saw me crying and took me to a separate room. "I know you, and I know you would never do something like that," said my father. He added, "Don't cry because of what other people say, you can't be stressed because other people feel like hurting you. If you know it's not true then keep your head up. Whenever you're in a situation like this just listen to the Bachata that says: 'Quien, quien eres tu? (Who, who do you think you are?)/ Para hacerme sufrir, para hacerme llorar (To make suffer to make me cry) / Quien, quien eres tu? (Who, who do you think you are?)/ Para hacer de mi vida un estupido mas (To make me another stupid one in this life)/ Si tu eres~feliz porque tengo yo que sufrir por ti? (If you are happy, then why should I suffer because of you?)'" That song will always remind me of my father. Every time I listen to this song, I can still picture that conversation all over again, and I love the imaginary feeling of having my father close to me.

Bachata songs usually have a sentimental love story behind them. They have a lot of feeling and a lot of heart. It makes you think. If I find myself in a situation similar to a song I seem to pay more attention to the lyrics. I can relate to a lot of the songs. I try to connect the songs to my life in some way, and that way I enjoy it even more. The way the

artists express themselves in the Bachata songs is from the bottom of their hearts, true feelings. There is a Bachata group who call themselves Aventura (Adventure). They sing beautiful love songs. One good example is their song, "Mi Corazoncito" (my little heart). The singer is singing to a girl he likes about his feelings towards her. She already has a soul mate. The singer from Aventura (Adventure) says to let him at least dream that her little heart is his. Some of the lyrics are: "No Ie digas a nadie (Don't tell anyone)/ Lo mucho que te quiero (How much I care for you)/ Que soy un bohemio loco (That I'm a crazy wonderer)/ No se 10 comentes al pueblo (Don't comment it in the neighborhood)/ No Ie digas a nadie (Don't tell anyone)/ Que tu vida es mi vida (That you are my life)/ Que me la paso imaginando, tenerte conmigo pero que va (I spend my days imagining that you are mine but oh well)." It is a very sentimental song. I like it because it is about real life situations and real life experiences.

I love dancing to Bachata. The sound of the guitar playing to the beat of the piano and the bongo is amazing. I love when I'm at a party and they play Bachata. It is the icing on the cake. I love it when they play the old school Bachata. That is my favorite type of Bachata. I love it when the DJ plays songs from Anthony Santos or Luis Vargas from back in the day like the 1980's. They are both Bachata singers and they are great. It doesn't matter what song they play; they are all very enjoyable songs. I have so much fun dancing to the beautiful beat of Bachata and stepping 1, 2, 3 to the front, 1, 2, 3 to the back and just letting my body flow with the beat.

Bachata is part of my roots. I'm Dominican and I love where I'm from. I love how we can dance from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. We Dominicans love to party and Bachata plays a big part in our parties, especially mine. I was raised in the Dominican Republic until I was 8 years old and I remember waking up in the morning to the sound of Bachata coming from my living room. It was like a melody to my ears.

Most of the Bachata singers are Dominican. Most of the Bachata singers come from where I came from and lived the way I once lived. Bachata makes me feel like I'm back home. Bachata is a great type of music. It is a type of music that I love to listen and of course dance to. I would love for every culture to enjoy it the way I do. I love everything about Bachata; I love the old songs, the new songs, and the different artists who sing Bachata. I love the meanings of the songs, the passion the songs have, I just simply love dancing to Bachata. Bachata is part of my roots as a Dominican and I'm a proud Dominican. Most importantly I love the way it brings back memories of times I have spent with my father. I can't wait for the future when I raise my children listening to Bachata and they will always have great memories of us just like my father, Jose Cruz and me.

Angelica Cruz, 21, lives in Lawrence, MA. She enjoys dancing, singing and spending time with friends and family. Angelica says, "Now I feel like I can write about any subject and I enjoy writing." after taking Basic Writing with Pat Scannell in fall 2008.

Metal: The Music not the Element
by Brendan Saba

Music has always been a part of my life. Music is a constant; it's something that is always there that I can depend on for inspiration or entertainment. I enjoy all types of music and even as a little kid I had an eclectic taste in music. The reason for this is probably my mother; she also has a wide variety in what music suits her. Although we share many similar tastes in music my favorite type of music is one that she isn't very fond of, which is heavy metal. I prefer metal over all other genres because it has given me a deep appreciation for the lyrics that most metal bands write; it has opened me up to other types of music, and it has also influenced me in playing the guitar.

The first time I had ever heard metal music was at a local show in my town. I was there to see my cousin's band which had a pop punk sound, but I was more intrigued by the metal band that was there. Metal bands usually have a vocalist who screams instead of sings but some have a singer and a screamer. When I had first heard the screaming I couldn't tell if I liked it, but the heavily distorted guitars and the use of chords I'd never seen made up for it. When I went home I downloaded a few metal bands and once I could hear the screaming a little clearer and heard the variations of different bands screams, I found a passion for it.

I started listening to metal everyday and found that it is a more poignant genre of music than rap or punk rock. Most mainstream rap lyrics tend to be about money, drugs, or alcohol. A lot of punk rock lyrics are political or about rebelling. Metal lyrics usually show a lot more meaning and beauty. Lyrics are something I really look at when hearing a new band; I want to know what their views on life are or to hear whatever it is they write about. Some really passionate lyrics from a metal band called Poison the Well go like this, "Why do your eyes paralyze me! /What makes me feel this way Sleep on portraits painted as perfect as *you!* / Why have I been given the chance to fly/ When I'm not with you I feel lesser alone! / Time slows down when you look at me."

This was a song that really changed the way I looked at music not only because of the beautiful lyrics but also because it led me to something else. When I was downloading this song about five years ago I remember first downloading what I thought was this Poison the Well song and it ended up actually being an up-and-coming rapper. I heard what it was and at first I was overcome by disappointment, but then I realized the beat wasn't like any mainstream rappers beats, it was original and had real instruments. This was when I realized every genre of music has its own passion and way of moving someone. I started listening to all different types of music again such as classic, acoustic, even pop and country music, but metal would remain my favorite genre even still today.

Listening to metal has given me a new look on playing the guitar. I found it was easy to make simple metal songs on the guitar. Then I learned of a technique I had never heard of before called sweep picking, when you play almost every string individually up and then back down but in a quick "sweeping" motion. It takes a lot of practice to master. I first heard of this sweeping technique in a song by a band called Between the Buried and Me. It sounded like they were playing thousands of notes per second, which was when I realized I had to learn this technique. Metal has changed the way I think of and play the guitar and it's all because of the type of music I listen to.

Metal has shown me the beauty in things as simple as lyrics. It has opened my ears to hear every different genre of music and like it for how it sounds, not for what genre it is. Most of all metal has inspired me to write my own music and to learn technical guitar riffs by starting out with simple dropped D tuning and moving onto sweeping. Every type of music has the capability of being passionate; it just depends on how we interpret the messages and beauty beneath the notes. Just as the singer from Between the Buried and Me said, "It all makes sense, we're capable of beauty."

Brendan Saba, 18, was a student in Joanna Fortna's fall 2008 Basic Writing course. He used to procrastinate when having to write an essay and now he looks forward to writing.

Music of the Gods
by Eric Thomas

I've always liked Rock and Roll music, but from the first time that I dropped a needle on Van Halen's "Eruption," I was hooked. Edward Van Halen's two handed tapping technique, although previously credited to two guitarists, Albert Lee of Ten Years After, and a legend from Seattle by the name of Jimi Hendrix, it was Eddie's kinetic adaptation that opened up yet another chapter in the annuls of Rock and Roll music. The music's rebelliousness, wide diversity, and longevity only attest to its popularity.

My first exposure to Rock and Roll came courtesy of my guitar teacher, who up to that point focused solely on Mel Bay's teaching books, which centered on Folk music. One day (perhaps he was bored), he asked if I was ready for something completely different. I was nine years old at the time, and the folk lessons were getting a little stale, so I said sure. At that point he proceeded to teach me Deep Purple's "Smoke on the Water." The music's energy held me spellbound. The simplistic driving bass line to its rifle-shot snare drum, coupled with a soaring Hammond organ and screaming vocal track, convinced me to put the folk lessons on the back burner. It's funny, I've known dozens of guitarists since then and most of them cite this song as the first piece of music that they learned to play.

As a genre, Rock and Roll has always meant one thing, rebellion. It was true sixty years ago with Doo Wop music, and it is true today. From the first time Elvis shook a hip on the Ed Sullivan Show to today's offerings Rock and Roll has always made a statement. From teen angst to war protests and everything in between, Rock music has always been able to find a voice.

The music's diversity guarantees that there is a style for everyone. From the 1950's catchy four part harmony Doo-Wop groups to the1960's trippy psychedelic sound inspired by the discovery of distortion to the electric "Me" decade of the 1970's with its sparkly arena/glam rock sounds gave older folks a style to call their own. Younger listeners meanwhile got to experience the 1980's blossoming of rough, loud metal bands and the brooding grunge movement of the 1990's, along with the rock/rap hybrid sounds of today. The common denominator of all these types of music is that they all took what came before them and then expanded upon it pushing the boundaries yet wider with each passing generation offering something for everyone.

A song that exemplifies this diversity is one of my favorites. It is a ten minute epic of a song called "Freebird" and was written by a group that hails from Gainsville, Florida named Lynyrd Skynyrd. The lyrics start, "If I leave here tomorrow/ Would you still remember me?/For I must be traveling on now/Cause the Lord knows I'm to blame/But if I stayed here with you girl! Well things just wouldn't be the same/ Cause I'm as free as a bird now/ and this bird you cannot change." The song starts slowly with a piano and finger-picked acoustic guitars that sweetly tell a story of non-commitment.

Then about halfway through the song, its tempo doubles and you are met with the full frontal assault of a triple guitar attack. Interweaving guitar solos at blazing speed is one of the trademarks of this group and "Freebird" is their coup de' grace.

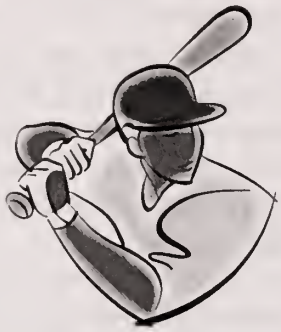
The lead was originally played by only one of the guitarists, a man called Steve Gaines whose life was tragically cut short when the band's tour plane crashed in the swamps of Florida. Steve's younger sister Cassie Gaines and the band's lead singer Ronnie VanZandt also perished in the crash. Later, the group re-formed using the services of Ronnie's equally talented younger brother Johnny. Still touring to this day, it's nearly impossible to tell the difference.

Rock and Roll's longevity and popularity can be partially attributed to the fact that it took its roots from the Blues, thus broadening its audience right from the start. Add to the fact that Rock music has always evolved with each passing generation, gaining new fans along the way, and you have a formula for success that seems likely to continue.

For me, Rock and Roll's rebelliousness, diversity, and rich history are only part of the allure that this music holds for me. The rest of the equation is that it has the ability to touch a part of my soul. I can hear a certain song and be transported to a different time, place, or even an event. The fact that I read, write, play, and listen to Rock and Roll music, makes it less of a genre and more of a state of mind.

Eric Thomas, 45, of Lawrence, MA took Basic Writing with Kassie Rubico in the spring of 2009. He is working towards a career in the health care field and enjoys playing the guitar, pinball and poker in his spare time.

Swing for the Fences
by Bobby Dennis



All my life, from the age of 5 until now, I have been swinging a baseball bat. I have 13 years of baseball experience under my belt, many league championships and 5 straight MVP trophies and awards. So if you want to learn how to swing for the fences, then try my techniques. It is very easy and simple to learn. Just follow these techniques and you will be hitting homers in no time.

First of all, you have to decide which bat is right for you. I use an Easton Stealth Limited Edition bat. Its weight is 29 ounces and it is 32 inches long. It is carbon fiber wrapped to be as light as possible with a nitrogen chamber in the center to give it the right balance. My suggestion for picking out a bat is to make sure you feel comfortable using it. Go to the batting cages and they have every bat out there; try each one out for at least 20 - 30 pitches and get a feel for the right bat. Second, make sure you can handle the bat you are using. For instance, make sure it's not too heavy or you won't be able to swing it properly. The next thing to watch out for is the length; if a bat is too long you won't be able to control the head of the bat. You will know if the bat is too long if when you swing you cannot stop it right when you want to. It will wobble around loosely. The right way to hold a bat is to put your weak hand on the bottom of the handle and place your dominant hand over the top then point your index fingers forward and make sure they are lined up; this will ensure that you are getting the maximum power out of your swing.

Next, you will have to find where to set your feet. I like to set my feet up towards the back of the batter's box. I do this because I like to be able to wait on the ball so I have that split second longer to think of what I want to do. Second, figure out where you have your hands on the bat. If you are slower on swinging you will choke up a little on the bat; this means that when your hands are on the bat you want to have space between your hands and the bottom of the bat. The bottom of your weak hand will rest on the knob of the bat and your dominant hand will rest on top of that hand.

The last thing I want to talk about is when to actually start swinging. This will take weeks, possibly years, to at least make a little contact with the ball almost every time. First, watch the pitcher's release point. A release point is where the pitcher lets go of the ball to deliver it to the plate towards you. This is vital if you want to have any success on making contact. You will notice that some pitchers throw the ball really close to the ground, a submarine throw. This makes you move your eyes down when normally you are looking up. This can be very confusing to some batters. Watch how long it takes the pitcher to deliver the ball to the plate. A normal pitcher will take between 2.2 and 2.8

seconds. If you can see the pitcher's fingers right before he throws the ball that pitch will be in your favor because you will already know what kind of pitch will be coming up. If it's a curve ball you will know you have to wait that extra .20 seconds for that pitch to come in. To learn what pitches look like what, watch the rotation of the ball. If it is spinning really fast, it's most likely a fastball. If the ball has slow rotation, it is a slider or a curveball.

Now swing the bat. For me I tap my foot on the ground several times while the pitcher is winding up then when I see his release point I raise my leg higher, plant it, and swing away. To learn when to swing is very simple. Keep the bat on your shoulder so you can figure out when you should start swinging. To swing the bat raise your leg, stomp it into the ground, and move your arms forward with your bat extended trying to keep the biggest part of the bat over the plate. If you can keep the head of the bat over the plate you will be able to control it with your wrists. It doesn't take much to move the head of the bat because you are swinging it so fast. Another tip for swinging the bat is look at one of your favorite baseball players and see how he swings a bat by watching it in slow motion. This will help you. Look at his wrists and see how you can improve yourself.

I hope these tips will work out for you. I know that over the years all of these steps have helped me be one of the better hitters on every one of my baseball teams I've been on. Remember to keep practicing and practicing these steps until you could be one of the best. If you do find yourself struggling, have someone video tape you during a game. Watch the tape of you swinging then watch one of a professional swinging. See where his feet are and where yours are. I hope these steps have helped you. I know they have certainly helped me. Good Luck!

Bobby Dennis is a 19-year-old student from Clare Thompson-Ostrander's fall 2008 Basic Writing course. He lives in Newbury, MA and feels that he is "a stronger writer now and likes writing more."

Become the Undead
by Paula Aliano

Halloween is coming up. Do you know what you are going to be? If not, don't worry. I have the perfect solution to your costume dilemma. What better way to celebrate the day of the dead than to become a zombie? It's an inexpensive way to look like you spent months preparing for this one night. With my help you will look like you just paid a professional make-up artist to do your make-up. After all, you are getting all your tips from one. I have been a certified make-up artist for three years. In that time I have made countless monsters including zombies. I am currently working for Spooky World as part of the special effects team. With my fashion advice and easy to follow make-up application steps, you will become a perfect example of the walking dead.

Before you can become the undead, you will need a few essential materials. Becoming a zombie is not a cut-and-dried thing. There are many ways and types of zombies that you can become. But I am going to show you how to create the most basic and stereotypical kind of zombie. Remember, you can always add more to your costume but without any of these items, your zombie look will be noticeably incomplete. You will need to create the look that you were buried and properly apply gashes and theatrical make-up.

First, you will need your zombie attire. Go through your parents' closet, the nearest thrift store or even use some of your old clothes that you don't mind cutting or dirtying. Try to keep the clothes generic. A flannel button down shirt and a pair of denim jeans are the perfect attire choice for this occasion. Whatever you do decide on, shred the articles of clothing in some key areas: at the side of your stomach, sleeves, and around the area of your knees. After you have cut your clothing, literally roll them in dry dirt. This will give you the effect that you just crawled out of your grave.

After you have completed the clothing aspect of your costume next comes the most crucial part of the zombie making process, the make-up. Without it, you are simply not a zombie. Even the way you apply your make-up will either make or break your costume. You will need the following materials: a popsicle stick, scar putty, E-Z FX injury stack pack and Cinema Secrets gel stage blood. I recommend going to The Halloween Outlet in Worcester, MA. They have a wide variety of professional stage and special effect make-up. If you cannot travel to Worcester, all these items and more are available online at www.halloweenoutlet.com. Another great feature of this store is that they are open year round. The key to becoming a zombie is the order to how the make-up is applied.

The first thing you will do is apply the gashes with the scar putty. It is important

to make sure your face is dry and without any previous makeup or lotion. The putty will not stick to an oily surface. They are a few ways besides the one I am showing you to create the same kind of wound. I choose this method because it is the easiest and produces the most realistic effect for someone with little to no make-up experience. When you first open the putty, warm it up in your hands. At first, it will be hard but with your body temperature it will become tacky and easier to mold. When the putty becomes pliable, place it in a horizontal angle on your cheek by using a popsicle stick. Make it about an inch thick and about five inches long. It should look like a long worm on your face. Don't worry about it looking like a scar just yet. You are just placing it. With the popsicle stick, press down along the edge of the scar, so the end of the putty blends in with your skin. This will also give the effect of a real wound. Use the edge of the popsicle stick, carve a line through the middle of the scar putty. Be sure to not make the line completely straight. A straight line will make the wound appear fake. Congratulations, you have just made your first gash! Feel free to repeat this process on any part of your face or body. You can make scars as thick or long as you want. The more gashes you create, the bloodier you will look.

The next step to becoming a zombie is applying the actual make-up. This is the most time-consuming part of the process. To start, you will need the E-Z FX injury stack pack. As you can see this set comes with a sponge and five essential colors: black, white, red, yellow and green. I prefer this company because it gives you all the essential colors you will need without buying them separately. First, mix a small amount of the black with the white, creating a light gray color. Apply a thin layer of gray all over your face and neck, avoiding the actual scar you have just created. By using this grayish color as a foundation, you give your skin that dead look every zombie acquires. Next, take a very small amount of the black and mix it with the red. Use your fingers to dab and blend the color to the area under your eyes. This will make you look like you haven't slept. With the same mixture of color use the sponge to dab around your scars. This will dramatize and make them look more distinct. The next color you will need is the yellow. This color is very important because it gives the effect of your skin decaying. Use your fingers to dab the yellow around the entire edge of your face. Start at your top left ear and follow your hairline completely around your face. Be sure to blend this color with the gray so it doesn't look like you have a ring of yellow around your face. The idea is to make it look as realistic as possible. Continue using the yellow around the collar of your shirt and in the creases of your nose and mouth. Next use the green, covering the same areas as you used the yellow. Make sure you use less of the green so you still see the yellow. The green color is to just add more depth to the areas that have already started to decay. Once you have blended all the edges of the colors, the last step in this process is adding black to the middle of your gashes. This one little touch gives your wounds the effect of being much deeper than they really are.

The last and, for me, the most fun step is adding the blood. It ties everything you have done together. Start by smearing the blood on the areas where you ripped your clothing. Feel free to pour the blood anywhere else on your clothing. This simple step gives the illusion that you have been fighting with your victims and they eventually lost their lives. Next apply the blood to the face. The most important areas are the creases of the gashes. Put enough blood in the gashes so it drips out. Next, apply the gel blood to the creases of the eyes and mouth so it's also dripping. By having the blood drip out of your

mouth it looks like you have just eaten your first human! Don't worry. It is ok for you to consume because it is primarily made of corn syrup and food coloring.

Remember, there is no exact science to make-up. These are just helpful tips and rules of thumb that I have learned from my years of doing make-up. This project should be fun and allow you to partake in one of the most theatrical holidays celebrated. If you think you messed up on the some step along the way, remember, it is only make-up!

Paula Aliano, 22, lives in Lawrence, MA and is working towards a career as an art therapist. She took Basic Writing with Clare Thompson- Ostrander in the fall semester of 2008. Before taking the course Paula was nervous about writing and now she is "more confident in my writing and learned that like anything else, writing is a skill that needs to be practiced regularly."

Barks and Bubbles
by Mariel Cipriano

We love our dogs, right? They're our best friends, our partners in crime, our loving pets, and the best cuddlers in the world. But let's be honest, if you're a dog owner, you know that when they get dirty, they get really dirty! Giving your dog a good cleaning can be tedious at times, but I have come to find a technique that works fairly well and is also a good way to bond and build trust with our wet-snouted buddies. If you follow these simple steps, you'll be able to easily and efficiently clean your dog.

Before you begin, you will want to gather all your materials, including your dog of course. Ideally you will need to acquire pet shampoo, specifically for canines, a lengthy outdoor hose, a pet hairbrush, a leash, towels, a muzzle if your dog is relatively aggressive, and patience. It is also a good idea to bring a few treats to reward your dog for good behavior. Once you have everything gathered up, you need to find a good, spacious location to wash your pup. I have found the easiest and most convenient places are somewhere outside, like a driveway, or even a deck. Try to avoid grassy spots or dirt, as it is likely that your dog will only get dirty again. Now you're ready to get started.

First, you need to secure your dog with a leash to anything around you that is stable, like a tree or railing. This will help you control where and how far your dog can move, making this process a lot easier. It also leaves both hands free for a more productive wash. Be careful not to trip over the leash. You might end up having to wash yourself up after you finish with your dog. Also, if your dog is aggressive, or not used to being bathed, it could be helpful to use a muzzle until the dog is more used to it. It is very important to make sure that your dog is comfortable throughout the cleaning process.

Next, get the hose ready. It is best to use a lower pressure hose so that you do not irritate your faithful pal or scare them away. Gently rinse your dog with the hose all over. He or she may be a little hesitant or frightened by the hose, but they will eventually get used to it. The leash and muzzle make this part much more manageable.

After a good wet-down, it's time for the shampoo. Start with a small quarter-sized amount in the palm of your hand, and then work it into your dog's fur. You can use more if needed, but don't use too much to the point where your dog is covered in soapsuds. This can become very irritating to the skin. Massaging the shampoo into the fur can be very relaxing for your dog, as well, especially if he or she is particularly jumpy or uncomfortable. Make sure to shampoo all over, avoiding the eyes, inner ears, nose, and mouth. If you do get any shampoo in any of these areas, it would be best to get in touch with a veterinarian as soon as possible.

Once covered in shampoo, you need to rinse again. Grab the hose, and softly start rinsing out the shampooed areas. Cover your dog's eyes with a hand so that the shampoo does not run into them, as well as the nose, and mouth if opened. It is best to rinse two or three times, to make sure you get all of the shampoo out of your dog's fur. Left over shampoo can cause skin irritation and chronic itching.

The final step is to dry. Take your towels and tenderly towel-dry your dog for about 5 - 10 minutes for a good dry finish. Don't be too rough. And don't be afraid to use a few towels, either. Dog's hair is sometimes tough to get dry because it holds a lot of moisture. Brushing through your dog's hair or fur after a wash is also a good idea because it will get rid of any excess hair that contributes to shedding. Toss them a treat or two, as well, to reward them for their good behavior, along with some loving praise and petting.

Following these steps will result in a very successful bath for your hound. I find that when I am done bathing my dog, she feels a lot more relaxed and trustworthy of me. Now that our pups are all clean and happy, it's the perfect time for some fresh, immaculate cuddling. So go get your dogs and get to it.

Mariel Cipriano is 19 and lives in Salem, NH. She is working on becoming a drug and alcohol counselor and took Basic Writing with Joanna Fortna in spring 2009. Mariel says that she loves writing now and practices it on a daily basis.

Pedestrians Distractions
by Chi Luu

Have you ever been distracted while you are driving? The most frequent cause of disturbance is not the radio, CDs, cell phones or even GPS systems; it is the pedestrians on the streets. Driving on the street, especially in downtown Lawrence, drivers are always distracted by young pedestrians and most of them are children. The effects of it can increase the number of car accidents and pedestrians getting seriously hurt or even killed. In my opinion, the pedestrian laws should be stricter in Lawrence.

One reason I believe that the pedestrian's law should be stricter in Lawrence is because of children's safety. The law should be stricter to keep children from not playing or running on the street because they can be seriously hurt by a moving car. I remember the time when my uncle and I were searching our way in downtown Lawrence. My uncle was driving while I was looking at a map and searching for the way to get to the NECC Lawrence campus. The street was rather crowded with many running cars and cars parked on both sides of it; therefore, we were driving very slowly, about 30mph. Suddenly, there was a little girl who ran after and tried to catch another girl. They were running straight to the right side of our car. My uncle immediately dodged to the left and pressed the brake to stop the car. Though the girl did not get hurt, we nearly crashed into another oncoming car. The young girls, who were about 7 to 10 years old, did not realize that their dangerous playing could have made them almost get seriously hurt. They kept playing their tag game of running after the other right into their house. I wondered how much trouble we could have gotten into if my uncle had not stopped the car in time. Therefore, I suggest that we should have stricter laws that do not allow children to run free on the streets for their own safety.

The second reason that we should be stricter with pedestrians in Lawrence is because of fairness for drivers. When a pedestrian is hit by a car, the law absolutely shifts the most blame to the driver. Pedestrians know this and some carelessly cross into the street without looking for cars; they even try teasing and obstructing the drivers. I wonder if it is fair for the driver if an accident happens in those cases. One time when I was driving on Salem Street in Lawrence, the street was really dark because the area had lost electricity at that time. I stopped at the intersection of Salem St. and Osgood St. to wait for the traffic lights. When the green light turned on and I was ready to go a 9-year-old boy who was riding a bicycle tried to cross in front of my car. The street was illuminated by only my car lights. If I did not carefully observe the street, I might have not noticed him. After waiting for him to ride safely to the roadside, I started to go. However, the boy ran after me, rode his bike very close in front of my car and tried to block my way. I almost hit him. I was so scared and shocked that I could not say anything. I was so mad because while I was scared that he might get hurt I saw he was bursting into laughter. At that time, nobody was in the intersection except me and him so I wondered how much trouble I might have gotten into if he had been hurt. For that reason, there should be stricter pedestrian laws for the fairness of all drivers.

The last reason that we should have stricter laws for pedestrians in Lawrence is it will help drivers avoid unjust payment situations. People who avoid the careless

pedestrians might damage their cars by hitting other cars, curbs, lamp-posts, fire hydrants, etc. and have to pay a lot of money to fix them. Nobody wants to pay a large amount of money in those situations when it is actually not their fault. I remember the time when I took my mother to go to the Asian Market on Union Street in Lawrence. I had seen one car hit a curb. Though the car was moving very slow, about 25-30 mph it was still damaged because the driver tried to avoid a pedestrian who suddenly jaywalked in the street. That pedestrian just stopped to look for a moment. Then he went away and left the driver behind with his damaged car. I did not see how much damage the car had gotten and whether the driver got out of his car to talk to that pedestrian but I was sure that at least it had a scratch on the body. I knew that because I had heard a sound of something breaking when it happened. In this case, the driver could not make that pedestrian pay for the damage because we do not have a law in that area. The driver either had to fix for his car's damage or his car insurance would go up a few years. I wonder how fair the law is for that driver?

How can we enforce a stricter law? We can give a ticket for those parents who don't watch and let their children play or run out into the street. In addition, it would be better if there were more police officers riding bicycles, at least in spring and summer, in downtown Lawrence. In that way, they can easily watch the kids who hang out on the corner of the streets or give tickets to people who jaywalk.

When driving on the street, we have to very carefully look for too many things like other cars on the street, the traffic lights, traffic signals and the pedestrians. However, accidents can't be avoided if drivers are distracted by unconscious and irresponsible pedestrians. Putting stricter laws for the pedestrians on the street, which I mentioned above, especially in downtown Lawrence, is the important change we should make for the safety of the children, fairness for the drivers, and avoiding unjust insurance payment situations for the drivers.

Chi Luu, 23, lives in Lawrence, MA. When not taking classes at NECC, she enjoys shopping, listening to music and hanging out with friends. She feels, "much more confident and ready to move on to the next level of writing" after taking Basic Writing with Clare Thompson-Ostrander during the spring 2009 semester.

Consideration of the Environment
by Michelle Blanchard

Every Thursday, I will always hear my mother yelling about all the trash that ended up on our lawn or in the backyard. I've lived on Apple Crest Drive in Methuen since I was nine years old and Thursday is trash day in our neighborhood. Most people on my street put their trash out the night before or even two nights before, which causes the trash to always blow over or animals to get at it. Since my house is at the bottom of a hill, the loose trash will always blow into my yard. I think the people that live on my street should be a lot more considerate about the way they keep their trash in front of their house.

To start off people should pick up after themselves if they notice that their trash tips over. A lot of people, not just from my neighborhood I've noticed, think that once their trash is on the curb it isn't their responsibility anymore. This obviously is not the case until the trash has been taken away. If they made the trash, it's their responsibility to clean it up and be considerate of the environment. In my neighborhood, one guy's trash, four houses up from mine in the pink house, always goes everywhere every week that he puts it out. He will always put his trash out two nights before trash day. His trash always goes everywhere on the first night, and he won't pick it up the next day. One specific time, just a month ago, his trash fell everywhere and for two days trash was blowing down to my house. My mom had to pick up ten empty cigarette packs, about five cans, and three empty beer boxes. It shouldn't have been her responsibility to do this, but unlike some others she likes to keep our yard clean.

If people would pick up after themselves, it would also help the environment be a lot cleaner and healthier. I never used to know anything about how loose trash can cause the environment to suffer. My cousin, Casey, who is now twenty-four years old, is an environmental major from Colby College. She is now a law student at Suffolk Law School for environmental issues. She has also been working at the Environmental Protection Agency for almost three years now. She has informed me on a lot of issues and a lot of what I need to know when it comes to ways to protect the environment. If there was less trash littered everywhere, the environment would be very clean and we'd be able to save some of our water sources and other important parts of the environment. Also, loose trash can cause death to a lot of animals if the trash is non-biodegradable because some of the products can be poisonous. The other day, a different house on my street, just three houses up from mine in the yellow house, left their recycling bin out early. Someone had hit their bin and all the bottles and cans fell out. Along with a bunch of cans, the two aerosol cans that she put into the bins were the most harmless. Aerosol cans can be very dangerous to micro-organisms. Also, the aerosol cans damage the ozone layer because of the propellant that is used to force the aerosol out of the can. Also, there are a lot of little kids on my street that are always playing on the street. If the cans had stayed there, they probably would have tried playing with them and that can be very dangerous if the kids had tried that.

Lastly, people should pick up their trash after themselves in my neighborhood to be respectful to their neighbors. Not only does trash end up in my yard, but I do see the houses next to mine with some loose trash as well. Also, if I'm driving I see some houses with trash in their yards on the street over from mine too because someone else's trash

had fallen over. You can tell that the houses that have the loose trash on their yards are from my neighbors too because it's pretty much the same trash that my mother is constantly picking up. On the streets next to mine, it seems worse because I always see trash bags with holes in them or tipped over barrels that nobody pays attention to. A lot of people are very precise about their yards and it bothers them if trash ends up being everywhere. My uncle takes very good care of his lawn. His grass is always green and my aunt plants a lot of nice flowers around the house. One day, the garbage men went to go throw a bag into the truck and it didn't make it and the contents in the bag went everywhere. The men didn't end up picking up what had fallen when they missed the truck. My uncle had thrown a container of paint out and it fell and rolled onto his lawn. The cover had come off and paint ended up going everywhere. My uncle was mad. The paint didn't come off for almost a month because he didn't notice what had happened until the paint had already dried.

A solution to this problem is very easy to propose. I think that if everyone just waited until Thursday morning to put their trash out then there wouldn't be as much trash that goes everywhere. This will decrease the amount of loose trash everywhere because I've noticed that the trash only goes everywhere throughout the night because the wind usually picks up or the animals come out at that time. Also, the trash would only be out for a couple of hours rather than a couple of days, so there's less time for the trash to make a mess everywhere. Another solution is obviously that, if people were considerate, they would pick up the trash that goes everywhere when they see that their trash had fallen over.

All in all, people really need to be more considerate to their neighbors on my street when it comes to their trash going everywhere. My street is a mess with everyone's trash everywhere and it is very disgusting. If this problem doesn't change, it can be dangerous to our environment. Some stuff that is littered on my street can be very harmful to the animals and can damage the ozone layer. On the flip side, if things do change, then the environment will become a lot cleaner and healthier for people and animals to live in. Also, I won't have to hear my mother yelling every week and my neighbors will get along a lot better because they don't have to clean up after each other.

Michelle Blanchard, 19, was a student in Clare Thompson-Ostrander's spring 2009 Basic Writing course. She says, "I feel a lot stronger with my writing now." Michelle enjoys going to the beach and riding her jet ski in her spare time.

For the Good of Our Youth
by Erika Norman

In general participating in a sport can be extremely rewarding. However during my junior year in high school, my school had some budget issues and almost eliminated all sports out of the budget. Instead they raised the prices of all sports to a ridiculous price that no one could afford. I remember having to pay five hundred dollars to continue participating in the sport I loved, cheerleading. Looking back I realize how much I would have missed out on if my school decided to take sports away. Sports have been a positive use of time, a way to keep my grades up, and I have learned many life lessons. I have also made many lifelong friends through cheerleading. In my opinion, schools should not consider eliminating sports for any reason.

Playing a sport was an extremely rewarding and positive use of my time in high school. Today many kids are starting to use drugs and get into trouble at young ages because they think it's cool or to fit in. With my busy schedule of school homework and practice, I had little extra time to goof off. My time was based around cheerleading and my grades. When I wasn't at practice I was taking tumbling classes to better my skills and improve myself as a cheerleader.

Cheerleading also kept me in top physical condition, and I felt great about myself. When I look back at how I could have been spending my time, I appreciate all the extra practices my coach made us go to. I'm also proud of myself of all the time I spent on cheerleading because in the end it made me better.

Also, playing a sport can keep grades up and keep kids in school. While I participated in cheerleading the policy was if you failed any of your classes during the semester of the sport you played, you became ineligible to participate. Also, if you skipped a class or wasn't in school that day you couldn't go to practice without a written note from a parent. I remember one day I had a study last period and I decided to skip it and go home until practice. When I got to practice my coach told me that I was unable to practice that day because I left school. I felt extremely guilty because my team suffered because of me. That was that last time I skipped a class that whole year. During my junior year there was this girl who was a senior and I'll never forget how bad I felt for her when she couldn't compete at her last competition because she failed a class. When you participate in a sport, no matter what school you go to, bad grades and skipping school are simply not acceptable.

Through participating in sports I have learned many valuable life lessons. For example, I learned my first season in cheerleading how to possess good sportsmanship. I learned that having a positive attitude can not only improve your team's spirit, but can also change the way people look at you individually. I remember at a competition my freshman year how upset I was that my team did poorly. After the performance I had a bad attitude and even cried. My coach pulled me aside and practically in front of everyone told me I had to stop acting like that and that it was only hurting my team's confidence. She told me that there was always next time and we needed to move on from this bad performance. After the talk with my coach, I realized that I was acting like a

baby and I was embarrassed about the way I acted. I also realized that I had no sportsmanship at all.

Participating in a sport is the best way to make friends. When I was a freshman in high school I switched high schools in the middle of the year. I was scared that I wouldn't make friends easily. When I talked to my new guidance counselor, she suggested continuing to do cheerleading at my new school. I was so nervous to tryout because I didn't know anyone on the team. However, at tryouts everyone was so nice to me and treated me as if I had been on the team for years. I even walked away from tryouts with some new friends. Through my four years of cheerleading I can truly say that I made friends with everyone on the team. When you play a sport it's not hard to become friendly with all your teammates because you're around them every day, and you all have a common interest.

Sports are an excellent way for kids to use their time, keep their grades up, learn lessons that will last them a lifetime, and make friends. I know from personal experience that participating in school sports has shaped me into an all around better person. I don't understand why anyone would want to take such a positive thing away from schools. Anyone who has ever participated in a school sport before would agree with me when I say, I recommend that schools do not eliminate sports for the good of our youth!

Erika Norman, 18, of Salisbury, MA is more confident as a writer after taking Joanna Fortna's fall 2008 Basic Writing course.

101 Potholes
by Saratou H. Alabi

This year I have encountered more pothole problems than ever. Because of that, I decided to take a count of the potholes I came across as I drove around one busy morning doing a bunch of errands: to the post office, the bank, the dry cleaners, the salon, and finally to Staples in Tewksbury. I spent about three hours driving around, and I was shocked with the number I counted. Potholes can be equally dangerous, delaying, and costly. Obviously, the State of Massachusetts and towns should repair potholes immediately when they are reported to avoid problems.

First, I noticed a pothole in front of my driveway at Reservoir Street. Normally, I would stop and look before I proceed. There were cars coming from the right going toward route 110. I saw a car driving very fast down the hill. I'm sure he was over the speed limit. So I waited. There was another car parked across my driveway that almost got hit badly because the driver swerved his car to avoid the pothole at the speed he was going, and snapped the parked car's rear view mirror. I consider this very dangerous. Consequently, if the driver had swerved towards me, he would have crashed into my car. I called the city hall and reported the incident, but up until now the city has not showed up to repair the pothole.

One week later, I had a nine o'clock doctor's appointment to follow up on the result of my MRI on my supposedly fractured toe. I left my house at seven thirty to give allowance for traffic and parking. As soon as I turned left onto Lawrence Street, the van in front of me stopped suddenly because he had a flat tire from a pothole he couldn't escape. Therefore, I was delayed due to the fact that there was also a lot of traffic coming from the other side of the road. Besides, no one cared to wait or stop to ask, until a policeman came and directed the traffic. By the time I got to route 3, traffic had built up. I couldn't make my appointment and I had to reschedule. If the city had repaired that pothole sooner, there would be no pothole issue that caused me to suffer the consequences of a missed appointment.

Three weeks ago, I decided to go to Haymarket Square in Boston. About a few yards after I joined the Lowell Connector, I found myself in and out of a huge pothole in a flash. The impact was as if I went over a major speed bump, at eighty miles per hour. As a result, I ended up with a flat tire, and a broken strut and spring. Above all, I had a very high bill for repairs. Finally I sent a letter about the incidents, pictures of the pot holes, and my receipts, Not only to request a refund, but also to alarm the city about the damages that neglected potholes can cause. If only the city had done the repair in a timely manner, I would have saved some money.

In general, we all know it is not an easy job to maintain the roads, but the city should be aware of the dangers. If potholes are ignored; pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists will be in danger of an accident from an unseen pothole. Secondly, there will be

an unnecessary delay because of a tow truck, an ambulance, or fire fighters called for aid to the scene. Also, people will find it very difficult to manage the cost for services or repair because it is not budgeted. The Department of Public Works should take immediate action in repairing the dangerous 101 potholes I counted, so that we can walk, ride, and drive at ease again. I never knew Lowell potholes in this State would outnumber the 101 Dalmatian Puppies! This is very serious.

Saratou Hashim Alabi, 51, was a student in Laurie Hartwick's spring 2009 Basic Writing course. She is married with 4 children and likes to travel, cook, dance, and surf the internet. Saratou went from feeling "skeptical" about writing to feeling "confident."

Writing and Self
by Quynh Giao Nguyen

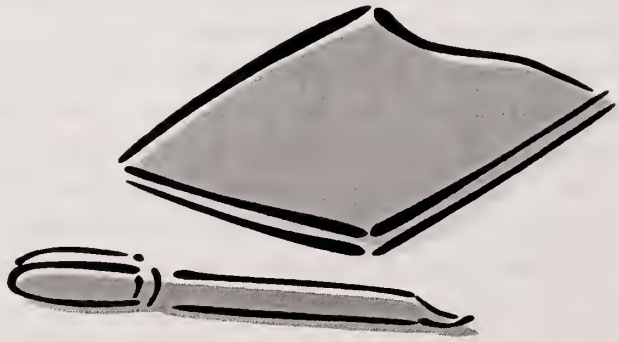
I started studying English at NECC almost three years ago from level one since I have been living in the United States. For me, writing in English is not easy. I felt nervous to take the Basic Writing course this semester. Because I did not do well in my exit ESL test, I felt less confident at the beginning of this class and worried what I would do to write better. However, step by step I have overcome my frustration, got more confident and felt interested in writing through this course. I have learned from the Basic Writing course the skills to make a successful essay by following steps: prewriting, choosing and using anecdotes and memories to support my ideas, revising, editing and proofreading.

The first thing I have learned from this course is prewriting skills. This is very important in writing because it will guide me to go to right direction to write following the assignment's requirements. The kind of prewriting that worked well for me was answering several questions relating to the topic and my life. After having received an assignment from my instructor, I thought about what I would write in my essay, and then I created some questions relating to the subject. For example, in assignment #3 "Writing a Narrative Essay, Using Dialogue" I had to ask myself what was the most impressive event in my life I could narrate, what experiences I got from it, and if it could be easy in using dialogue to tell and so on. From answering these questions in my mind, I started prewriting with an outline for my essay about the moment of separation between my father and our family. From prewriting I created this thesis statement, "The parting moment is unforgettable because it started the division that lasted seven years between my father and our family, and our peaceful life ended and miserable life began." I believe that prewriting helps me find and generate ideas, reject the ideas less supporting, and then organize the ideas that have the most effect on the topic.

Another thing I have learned from this course is the way to use anecdotes and memories as details to support my ideas or topic sentences. The powerful key for me to find those details is thinking about events that occurred that gave me strong feelings and impressed on my memories. I think that my most successful essays in this course are the essays written about my family. I have strong emotions when I think and write about my family. It is easier to find the details to tell about my family members. That is why I chose my father's letter as the topic for a meaningful object essay, my mother as the topic for a person essay and the parting moment between my father and our family as the topic for my narrative essay. I believe I did well in these essays because I was always present in those events I wrote about. I know a lot of people whom I wrote about, so I had strong feelings and remembered more details such as examples, anecdotes or memories to write about them. In my favorite essay, "The Best Mirror," I wrote about my mother. It is not difficult to describe her because I know her by heart. I have a lot of anecdotes and memories to write. I wrote it in the first person, so the details I wrote are more vivid because those are what I saw, understood, and felt about. I wrote, “My mother is a courageous woman. I am thinking about my family's difficult life after the revolution in 1975. We nearly lost everything in our comfortable life. My mother lost her job," and in that harsh environment, my mother was calm, strong, and unwavering in her support of

her family. She had to find other jobs which she never imagined that she could do" I wrote about her other characteristics, morality and empathy as well with the memories in my life because I was in those events. I have learned that I should write what I know, understand, and feel by details from my life so that my writing will be more interesting.

One more important thing I have learned from the Basic Writing course is revision. When I finished a first draft, I thought that my essay was almost done, but after rereading it, I realized that I had to revise it in some places. I fleshed out more ideas from the Writing Center staffs' suggestions when I visited there. Sometimes, my revision somewhere in my essay has come from our conversation about something else that was not her suggestion for my essay. I like this and I see visiting the Writing Center is very helpful. Also, I revise by adding more good details from my instructor's suggestion for the graded essays. In addition, I always read the peer response sheet and answer the questions as if I am a peer responder of every one of my essays. From this I found the way to revise my essays more efficiently. In some essays, from revision I changed titles to be more interesting. For example, the title in the first draft of the essay describing a person is "The Most Influence in My Life." However, after having reread my essay, the conclusion in the essay urged me to create another title. In that conclusion I wrote, "To me, my mother is the best mother in the world. Everything I have today is because of my mother's loving care. She has a lot of influence on me. I will never give up my life's goals. From my mother I have inherited a kind heart. I feel empathy with people, see the situation through their eyes and try to help, comfort and support them. All of my qualities are the result of my mother's characteristics: courage, morality, and empathy. She is the best mirror for me to look in and reflect on the person I am today." As a result, my essay's title was changed to "The Best Mirror" after the first revision.



Also, I have learned that a successful essay cannot lack the last steps, editing and proofreading. After editing, I thought my essays had been completed, but I still found the errors when I reread them. That is why I cannot ignore proofreading. There are errors in typing, comma splicing, and especially using prepositional phrases. Now, I still make mistakes and have more if I do this step in a rush. When writing with limited time, I often write less successful essays. I understand that this is the step I have to improve the most.

Right now, I am not a good writer, but I believe I became more successful in my writing from taking this course. I have felt more confident and interested when my instructor, Professor Mike Wilcomb, has suggested to me to submit three of my essays for the *Writers in Progress* book. I have strong emotions about my family and many

memories of my country, and they have been reflected in my essays. Throughout the essays "The Best Mirror," "The Unforgettable Moment," "Books and My Life," and "Music, My Country, and Me" I always find myself in every part of each essay. I will continue keeping what I have learned from the writing process and improving my writing skills in prewriting, using details to support the ideas, revising, editing and proofreading. From having improvements in my writing, I believe that when reading my essays, readers will identify who I am and be more impressed with my writing skills.

Quynh Giao Nguyen, 40, lives in Methuen, MA and is planning on becoming a laboratory technician. After taking Mike Wilcomb's spring 2009 Basic Writing course, she is "more confident and interested in writing." She enjoys reading, listening to music, and spending time with her family.

Creative Writing
by Gisselle Lucifora

Writing essays was always a fear of mine. I had no idea what a thesis statement was and my body paragraphs were always short and had poor detail. But ever since taking Basic Writing, my skills have improved significantly. I remember the first day of Basic writing, we were asked to write a short essay. When I look back at the essay now, I am blown away by how bad it was and how much I have improved over the weeks. Basic Writing has taught me prewriting and brainstorming skills, starting a first draft and adding detail, and editing skills as well.

My first skill that I learned in Basic Writing was prewriting. Prewriting is a good and easy way to brainstorm your ideas. For one, you can use a cluster. Clusters are usually my first choice when prewriting because I can branch off into further detail. They also help me think about my anecdotes and pull out as much detail as I can. Another way I prewrite is by using a list. Lists are easy to use as well. I remember when we were told to write about an influential person in our lives. I used a very long list to brainstorm physical descriptions about my brother, Sam. One of my favorite descriptions looked like this in my essay, "One funny thing that Sam does is that he never wears pants in the winter. He will always have shorts on even when the snow is a foot deep! He won't wear boots or sandals, just D.C sneakers because he likes to be comfortable. Sam always smells like Ferrari Red cologne and doesn't wear anything else besides it." This is an example on how I used a list to come up with my physical descriptions. By using prewriting, it has helped me make my essays stronger and will keep readers coming back for more.

Another skill that I have learned in Basic Writing is how to create a first draft of my essay. One of the techniques I learned was using the "who, what, where, when, why and how" method when writing anecdotes. This technique leads me to my strongest essay I had written, my media paper. One of the details looked like this, "Once she got to school, she added me as one of her contacts by saving my e-mail address, and then she called me on Skype. Once she called me, she started talking through the microphone on her laptop and then we could see each other by our built in webcams. We talked about her move in and Sorina showed me her decorated dorm room. I even got to meet Cheyenne, her roommate." These are a few of my favorite sentences because of how much detail they have. One reason why I think my media essay is my strongest paper is because my teacher graded it as an A- paper and she also said I should submit it for the *Writers in Progress* book. I was so surprised because I didn't think it was that good. But all of my hard work had paid off. Learning how to make my first drafts more detailed helped my media paper become my strongest essay yet.

One of my most frustrating essays I had to write was my object paper. It was not only our first essay but I think it required the most thinking. My teacher had shown us an easy way to get the object paper started. She drew a chart on the board and divided it up into five sections. Each section had each of our five senses in them. From there, we had to write in each section, what our object did for each of our senses. I found it incredibly frustrating at that point because I couldn't describe what my keychain smelled like or what it tasted like. It sounded silly to me at first, but after reading the object papers in the

Writers in Progress book, I suddenly felt motivated and tried to use all the techniques that we had learned. Even though my object paper was one of my most frustrating papers, I loved the outcome of it.

The last thing I learned in Basic Writing was the editing process. I never knew how much stronger you can make your paper by going back and reading it out loud. Things like comma splices and confusing words like your and you're were errors that I saw myself making constantly. I also had extra words in my sentences that were not needed. There are many techniques that I learned when editing. For one, I read my sentences backwards starting from the end of my paper and working my way up. By doing this, I see a lot of words and mistakes that I may not have seen before. While I'm doing this, I usually start to eliminate unnecessary words, usually three to four words. For example, words like really, very, and well are ones that I look for. Editing is an important process because it helps me make my essays much stronger by looking for the common errors that I make.

In the future, I'm going to try and not be afraid to write essays anymore. I have learned so much in Basic Writing and will always use the techniques that I have grasped. I now look forward to writing my papers and using anecdotes because of the amount of detail and creativity I can use. I can also edit my own paper and know what I'm doing. Prewriting, starting a first draft, and editing are all very important to the writing process and have helped me as a writer.

Gisselle Lucifora, 19, is planning on becoming a nurse. She lives in North Andover, MA and enjoys spending time with her friends and family. Gisselle took Basic Writing with Clare Thompson-Ostrander during the fall 2008 semester. She says about writing, "I enjoy it now because I can get creative."